THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

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Supporters Rally to Save Our Veterans Land

Steve Crandall

The rally on the 16th of August to save our veterans' property was a great success. We had individuals representing the Disabled American Veterans, Gold Star Families Speak Out, The Evan Ashcraft Foundation, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Iraq Veterans Against the War, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Veterans for Peace, Military Families Speak Out and the Broken Rope Foundation. Several local civilians joined in to support saving our veterans land. These groups and individuals all have different political views about the wars past and present, yet they came together to save our veterans land and support our veterans rights.

Veterans came from as far away as San Diego and Ventura to participate in the rally. They spanned several generations of war from World War II, to the Korean War, to the Vietnam War, as well as the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. Some were in wheel chairs and others were clearly still suffering from their wounds of war but none of these obstacles kept them from supporting our common cause.

They shared information about their military backgrounds and stories about their war experiences. Some of the stories were about the good times and others about the more difficult times. They also shared stories about their lives today, their hobbies and their involvement in fighting for veterans rights. Civilians spoke about their connections with veterans and desires to help save the land for veterans so they can have a place to heal from the effects of war.

The support didn't only come from the sign holders but also from the drivers and passengers of cars rounding the bend at Wilshire and San Vicente. The nearly constant sound of car horns echoed off the surrounding buildings as passengers and drivers gave us a thumbs up sign of support. Even though we had been on our feet for several hours it was that unexpected support that gave us the energy to hold those signs even higher and look forward to returning again.

This rally was a small example of veterans and civilians with different political viewpoints about wars past and present uniting around a common cause to Save Our Veterans Land. But as successful as the rally was, we still need the presence of the many veterans groups that weren't represented. When we all stand together, the VA and our elected officials will have to rescind the public park land deal with the Veterans Park Conservancy and keep their promise to preserve this land as a place for veterans to heal from war.

Steve Crandall is the president of the California Central Coast Chapter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

Building a GI and Veterans Movement

IVAW Field Organizing Team: Chantelle Bateman (East Coast), Jason Hurd (Southeast), Aaron Hughes (Central and Team Leader), Joseph Callen (West)

We would like to thank VVAW for your contribution. With your support we began a field organizing program that will provide leadership development tools for direct action and movement building based upon focal point campaigns. We will work tirelessly to further IVAW's goals; end the occupation of Iraq, care for returning vets and win reparations for the Iraqi people.

Our in-depth analysis of issues facing 124 IVAW chapters found 4 main challenges; lack of strong leadership experience, communication, unemployment and family issues, and PTSD (delayed stress, drug and alcohol abuse, burn-out).

We found that chapters were working on: GI Rights - At several military bases across the country (especially GI coffee houses) members are letting GIs know their rights around Stop-Loss, Conscientious Objection, AWOL status, Don't Ask Don't Tell, PTSD and mental health care inside and outside the VA. Support for 50 AWOL soldiers being held without charges some for a year or more at Ft. Bennings' brig, was discussed. All GI Rights work is a means for building relationships with individual soldiers and Marines and bringing them into the movement. Truth-In-Recruiting – talking with high school students about military experience (counter recruitment, military service and the constitution, realities of military service). The Chicago chapter is working on a campaign to demilitarize the public school system – the most militarized district in the US. We plan to train youth to do T-I-R and counter recruitment

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From the National Office

Bill Branson

VVAW is continuing its work as an anti-war organization with a vets base and focus. The President must withdraw from Iraq and stop the 8 year war in Afghanistan, where the Generals are raising a familiar clamor for more troops. Plans have been announced to keep our GIs occupying Iraq for many more years. HELLO! We don't see much progress here! We still have quagmires abroad and no money to take proper care of veterans at home.

Here is what Barack Obama had to say about Iraq in 2002; "I know that even a successful war against Iraq will require a US occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined cost, with undetermined consequences. I know that an invasion of Iraq without a clear rationale and without strong international support will only fan the flames of the Middle East, and encourage the worst, rather than best, impulses of the Arab world and strengthen the recruitment arm of al-Qaeda." Well said. Of course, even then, he thought that Afghanistan was a justified war. It is up to us to continue our anti-war work, even if it means criticizing a popular President. How many more GIs and civilians will be sacrificed for this "stupid war?"

VVAW has committed human energy and economic resources to the struggle for Agent Orange victim recuperation including compensation and support of the peoples of southeast Asia. This will continue to be an enduring part of VVAW's agenda.

VVAW continues to support IVAW by funding its grass roots organizing. Our contributions have enabled IVAW to hire field organizers and begin working nationwide. We encourage VVAW members to give IVAW all the help that they can.

VVAW is providing a real service to Veterans. We have added a mental health counselor Hans Buwalda. Besides working in the Chicago area, Hans and Ray provided services at the VFP and IVAW conventions.

We will continue through these tough economic times. We have drafted a budget which will allow us to keep moving toward our core goals. Some sacrifices will have to be made and we must have tighter planning.

"From the NO" reflects a consensus of the majority of the National Coordinators.

Bill Branson is one of seven VVAW National Coordinators.

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Barry Romo, Joe Miller
Charlie Branson, Ellie Shunas
Jeff Machota

Thanks to Jeff Danziger and Billy Curmano for their cartoons. Thanks to Aaron Davis, Horace Coleman, Carol Trainer, Bill Branson, Steve Crandall, Mike Hearington, Joe Orlando, Jan Ruhman, Aaron Hughes, Annie Bailey and others for contributing photos.

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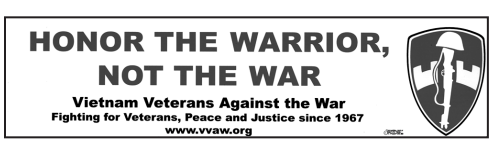

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Barry Romo at VVAW Memorial Day event in Chicago, 2009

Fraggin'

Bill Shunas

Since the beginning, this country has had national security concerns. It was worrying about the British counter revolution in the early days and on down to confronting Al Qaeda today. There have been varying degrees of threat in different periods of time. There have been varying degrees of exaggeration of those threats.

In our lifetime, national security was concerned with the communist menace up until 1989. Since then it has been the terrorist menace with brief diversions concerning Manuel Noriega, Saddam Hussein and Monica Lewinsky. I'm sure that many in and out of government have viewed the Communist and terrorist menace as being of equal magnitude. You can't compare the two. At the beginning of the nuclear age the US and the Soviet Union had these new nuclear toys which were tempting to use. At some point - probably around the Cuban Missile Crisis - both sides probably figured out that they were unusable. This threat became idle. Otherwise, forty years of Cold War never found the Soviets or the Chinese or the Cubans or the Eastern Europeans killing American civilians except maybe an occasional individual involved in espionage. There was direct contact only in wars started by Americans. These wars did not threaten American citizens, American freedoms and least of all the US nation.

Al Qaeda, on the other hand, may not be threatening our nation, but is targeting Americans. They target our military personnel stationed where they are not wanted, but more of their targets seem to be civilians. They were active in the decade before 9/11. Some of their operations were successful including the Trade Towers in 1993, the bombing of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and the bombing of the USS Cole in 2000. Other attacks were carried out without their intended result such as the bombing of the hotels where US troops stationed in Yemen were billeted. That bombing failed to kill Americans, but resulted in the deaths of locals and an Austrian tourist. Then there were some plots that never came off or were thwarted by police work such as plans to blow up a terminal at the Los Angeles airport or airliners in flight and various Y2K actions.

The point of the above is that this is real. I think that many on the American left do not acknowledge that Al Qaeda is a serious threat on which our government should act. We were so used to belittling our government's Cold War anti-communism as a cover for the military expansion of American capitalism that we tend to overlook that the same national security forces who cried wolf for decades might actually be correct about the dangers of Al Qaeda and Al Qaeda wannabees.

While we were becoming aware of the Al Qaeda danger there was a return to the old way of thinking on the part of the Bush administration when we went to war in Iraq. The Bush people - in a position to know better - also belittled the danger of Al Qaeda by using 9/11 in the same way as cold War anti-communism. Instead of focusing on Al Qaeda they went to war to spread American imperialism in the Middle East.

If an act of war is committed against any nation - such as the crashing of hijacked airliners into buildings resulting in the deaths of thousands of civilians - I think that nation has a right and an obligation, if possible, to act against the perpetrators. The complication with 9/11 is that this act of war was done by an organization. Yes, that organization retreated to Afghanistan. Should we therefore have gone after them in the sovereign nation of Afghanistan. I think yes. It should have been done as a search and destroy mission while Al Qaeda was not yet in a defensive position. What actually happened was that the US had a few advisers for the Northern Alliance, but basically no boots on the ground for two months. Osama escaped and lived to inspire more followers.

Al Qaeda has training camps in Afghanistan, training both military fighters and saboteurs (aka terrorists). It would be nice to militarily eliminate these camps, but it would be a hard and costly job. Check out your history. The British and the Russians both received an ass-whipping in Afghanistan.

Now we are stuck in Afghanistan to fight through the Taliban before we can reach and fight Al Qaeda. Afghan civilians who likely were not fans of the Taliban are being turned into Taliban supporters because of American heavy-handedness. They are becoming nationalists, opposed to American involvement, same-same Vietnam. It may be wrong to use the word "nationalist" because their allegiance is often tribal, but you get the idea. This war will go on and on. The price to pay to bring down Al Qaeda in Afghanistan has become too great. We blew it when we had the chance in 2001 so it is time to exit. That is something that many are reluctant to do. At some point, the cost in terms of troops, money and respect becomes too great. I think we are past that point.

The best way to deal with the Al Qaeda threat is through a combination of police work, a change of foreign policy in the Middle East and limited military action when and if possible. We need to forego the avenging of 9/11 for now.

You might look at Al Qaeda and Al Qaeda spin offs as fish at home in the sea of the Islamic world. Here they receive support in terms of finances and places to locate because they are standing up to the Americans. In this part of the world there seem to be four major complaints against the US: (1) stationing troops in the Muslim holy land of Saudi Arabia; (2) supporting the perceived suppression of the Palestinians; (3) being responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children after the Gulf War through bombings and UN sanctions and (4) supporting what they consider apostate governments in the Arab world.

If US policy could adjust in some of these areas of concern to the Arabs, support for Al Qaeda would begin to loosen. If enough changes happen, it could loosen to the point where Al Qaeda becomes irrelevant in the Islamic world and to us. Of the four points mentioned, we can't bring back the Iraqi children (although we could apologize), and it may not be politically possible to change Israeli attitudes at this time, but if we were to withdraw troops from Saudi Arabia and distance ourselves from governments like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the perceived need for Al Qaeda in this part of the world would diminish. Such is the best hope to end the so-called War on Terror.

Bill Shunas is a Vietnam veteran, author and VVAW member in the Chicago chapter.

Aaron Hughes at VVAW Memorial Day event in Chicago, 2009

Notes From the Boonies

Paul Wisovaty

Tim Johnson wants us out of Afghanistan now. OK, there are probably a couple of hundred guys named Tim Johnson who want us out of Afghanistan. But only one of them is my US Congressman from east central Illinois. As an old sage once observed, therein hangs a tale.

Tim is a rock solid Republican, which doesn't automatically make him a bad guy. (This disclaimer is important, as I do not wish to offend the three or four readers of this column who may claim allegiance to the party of Abraham Lincoln. *The Veteran* is a non-partisan publication.) But I have to give the guy some credit. About five years ago, he accepted an invitation from our Champaign County ACLU steering committee to jawbone with us about some current political issues. Tim knew, going in that night, there was not one person in the room who would vote for him on the proverbial coldest day in hell. But he showed up, was entirely honest with us about his opposition to most of the things we stood for, and I applaud him for having done that. He could have spent the evening hanging out in a men's room with Larry Craig or flying to Argentina with the Governor of South Carolina to find his soul mate, but he chose to spend that evening with the American Civil Liberties Union. Quite honestly, if I were a Republican, that's the last place on the planet where you would have found me.

The story now takes its first turn. About three or four years ago, several local anti-war groups, including the Champaign VVAW and IVAW chapters, held a community forum in which we asked Congressman Johnson to reconsider his support for the invasion of Iraq. There were several speakers at the event, including me, and, of course, we invited Tim to join us. We had a chair set up on the stage with an attractive sign labeled "Congressman Johnson," so that he would have privileged seating. As you might guess, he never showed up, presumably because 1) he didn't agree with us, and 2) he guessed, correctly, that a few of the speakers would say unkind things about him. I really don't blame the guy. If I got invited to a Tea Party I'm sure I'd skip it and spend the evening at the Tuscola Moose Lodge.

So flash forward to September 21, 2009. Congressman Johnson appeared at a town hall meeting in Gibson City, Illinois (population 2,500) and, as expected, was roundly applauded for his opposition to the President's health care reform plan. But then he did one of those unexpected Tim things: he called for an immediate pull-out of US troops from Afghanistan. Specifically, he said that "I'm suggesting to you that there is no end game. I believe that our men and women are there in a mission that is ill-defined. I think we're losing people by the day, with no even indirect relationship to our national security." He finished by saying that, "We've had a succession from Vietnam to Iraq to Afghanistan, and the net result has been thousands of lives lost, and very little progress made."

I should add that Mr. Johnson also opposed George Bush's "surge" in 2007, presumably among a small minority of Republican Congressmen who did so. I don't often agree with the guy, but I have to give him credit for having an independent streak. He ended the town hall meeting by telling the citizens of Gibson City that he is "going to be looking at legislation and issuing a definitive statement on my position on Afghanistan which would call for our withdrawal of troops forthwith."

I should point out that Tim Johnson gets re-elected regularly with a significant cushion. He could probably call for an invasion of Mars – or sponsor legislation asking us to pull our troops out of Mars – and still be a shoe-in for re-election. Folks in east central Illinois really love this guy.

Obviously confused and needing direction, I asked Dr. Joe Miller what to make of all of the above. Joe simply wondered whether Tim would be as desirous of pulling out of Afghanistan if George Bush or John McCain or (I have to say it) Sarah Palin were President. I don't know. I'm sure that Congressman Johnson knows, but probably the least effective way to find the answer to that question would be to ask him. I am also not suggesting that that observation renders him noticeably different from the rest of his Capitol Hill colleagues.

But, like the rest of us, sometimes I just have to sit back and say to myself, "Afghanistan? Afghanistan??" As one US commander there observed, walking around that country is like taking a stroll through the Old Testament. I mean those poor goat herders and poppy growers no disrespect, Allah love them, but what do we expect to accomplish there? Are we willing to commit what may realistically necessitate upwards of a hundred thousand troops into that country in order to pacify it? Didn't we learn anything from the Russians?

On an unexpectedly serious note, I do take these Al-Qaida folks seriously. They scare me almost as much as Ann Coulter. I'm just trying to figure out the connection which the President and the Defense Department make, between Al-Qaida's very real wish to destroy us and our military escalation in a place that makes Vietnam look almost winnable.

Is it really possible – God I hate to say this – that rock-solid Republican Tim Johnson has a better grasp on reality than the guy I voted for in the last Presidential election?

Paul Wisovaty is a member of VVAW. He lives in Tuscola, Illinois, where he works as a probation officer. He was in Vietnam with the US Army 9th Division in 1968.

More US Casualties in Afghanistan

My View - On Generals

John Zutz

September 11, 2009

Two ex-Generals, Charles Krulak and Joseph Hoar, printed an op-ed piece in the *Miami Herald* today titled "Fear Was No Excuse To Condone The Use Of Torture." The piece decries ex-VP Dick Cheney's defense of the use of torture by the US in the "War on Terror®."

Now, I have a problem with high-ranking individuals who weigh in a day late and a dollar short, and expect to get patted on the back for being so brave and self-sacrificing. And why are they getting so annoyed at Cheney's defense? Where were they when the torture was happening?

I wrongly assumed they kept silent to protect their careers and pensions. VVAW's Austin, TX contact, Dave Collins pointed out that both Generals had retired well before Cheney engineered himself into the Vice Presidency.

I guess I'm grumpy today, but I'm not going to give them much slack.

Retirement doesn't excuse them: it only gives them "plausible deniability." They can claim they didn't really know we were torturing people.

But somehow I knew we were torturing prisoners. I suspect most readers of this paper knew. Those who cared saw the pictures. We watched Lynndie England get convicted. We read the stories about how the approval to use the various techniques came down from the top.

Certainly being Generals – and not being total idiots – and having their Old Boy connections, these guys knew too. Being silent when they had nothing in particular to lose IS condoning torture.

Dave would have me understand the "code of silence" that's beaten into officers somehow exonerates them.

To that I politely reply – bullshit!

As officers I'm sure they were trained to resist physical and psychological persuasions. Furthermore, I'm pretty sure that code of silence was unspoken. Nobody sat them in an orientation class and explained it to them.

They perceived it themselves and convinced themselves that it existed, and I'm sure it does –as I said before, these are not stupid people. But that leaves me to conclude that they accepted that code of their own free will. Minus any overt effort to avoid the restraints of that code is tantamount to supporting it.

So by staying silent for those years they not only condoned torture, they also supported the culture that propagated it.

Don't get me wrong, I'm happy the Generals are speaking up now, but it's like McNamara apologizing before he died. I won't get too excited until they come out strongly for criminal prosecution - and name some names.

So let's get to the point, see *My View – On Torture (below)*.

John Zutz is a VVAW national coordinator and a member of the Milwaukee chapter.

My View - On Torture and Safety

John Zutz

Recently, our ex-VP Dick Cheney appeared from his undisclosed location to loudly contend that "enhanced interrogation techniques" kept us safe. September 11 gives us a convenient measure, but let's agree that safety is a judgment call.

Consider this: Not too long after the inauguration of the Bush/Cheney administration the Navy killed a bunch of people when a bigwig from a big campaign contributor (Enron) drove (on orders from the top) one of their neato multiple warhead armed "nukular" subs into a Japanese surface vessel. Just gives you that warm, safe feeling, right?

Author's aside: and a few short years later, the Enron scandal is revealed to be a mere side-track in the economic train wreck abetted by the same administration.

We achieved previously unattainable safety when, not too much later, one of our super-secret spy planes got shot down in China. Our fearless, tough leader begged to get the crew returned, and he let the Chinese keep the plane. We can all be thankful, however, he made sure that the prisoners had plenty of bibles. That safe feeling just gives a person goose bumps, doesn't it?

Not resting on their laurels, our leaders ignored intelligence warnings of a domestic attack. This paved the way for September 11, 2001 when four jetliners were hijacked simultaneously, by guys who trained in the US, while the normal interceptor cover was otherwise engaged (on orders from the top) and the twin towers came down. Are we safe yet?

With that kind of safety and defense record I can understand why they twisted and misrepresented the law to convince themselves that torture was legal. But don't expect me to believe, without persuasive evidence, that torture worked.

Oh, the evidence of its working is secret, and revealing it would jeopardize national security? Then, if in fact it worked, doesn't revealing that it worked also jeopardize that same security?

If we can't see the evidence directly, let one of the intelligence committees in Congress, who oversaw the whole debacle, confirm that torture worked.

John Zutz is a VVAW national coordinator and a member of the Milwaukee chapter.

Sir, No Sir! *came to Westminster University in Salt Lake City in April.*
Filmmaker David Zieger (l) chats before the screening with VVAW member Larry Chadwick.
Larry, David, Rick Miller and IVAW member Andy Figorski took part in a panel after the screening.

Fog of War

Harold Trainer

More US military were killed in Afghanistan during both July and August than at any time since we invaded the country. The war is becoming President Obama's War and he soon will have to live with the results of this war. Living with the results of war is not good or easy.

Coincidentally, Secretary Robert McNamara died in August at the age of 93. He stated a number of years ago that we and he were terribly wrong to fight and die in Vietnam.The documentary about McNamara, entitled, *Fog Of War,* documents how war can go so wrong and the huge mistakes made in Vietnam by a government that thought they were doing the right thing. The Vietnam War is now sometimes known as McNamara's War, killing more than 58,000 American Military and a million plus Vietnamese.

It is somehow easy to think in the present that a war is necessary and important to the security interests of the country as President Obama has said. It is much harder to see the past and then look into the future and through the "Fog of War" to a place where death and dying cannot be supported and the war becomes a terrible wrong and mistake.

We do not want that to happen to this president, our country and to our brave young men and women who have chosen to join the military. He needs to see through the Fog of War and see the future and how terrible it may be for him and his family and the country.

VVAW was among the sponsors who recently brought anti-war activist and Gold Star Mother, Cindy Sheehan, to Louisville from September 7-12. Cindy made international headlines in 2005 by setting up camp for an extended Iraq War protest outside Bush's ranch in Texas. Cindy's son Casey was killed in combat in Iraq, leading her to become a founding member of Gold Star Families For Peace. She made numerous appearances in Louisville recently and challenged Obama's policies on Iraq and Afghanistan. Our country's reckless use of our military cost her son's life in Iraq. Afghanistan and Washington war policy including media coverage will cost more mothers and fathers their kids' lives. She continues to speak out against the Iraq War and Afghanistan War at a number of appearances including the Muhammad Ali Center, Bellarmine University, University of Louisville and through appearances on National Public Radio and local TV stations. She said she was worried that many people who rallied for peace were protesting more against Bush and his policies than the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. She said that Obama has continued the military policies of his predecessor. Cindy told people that protesting the wars now are unpopular, often from a different set of people, referring to criticism from the Democrats for challenging Obama. She fired up the local peace community, some of whom have not spoken out against the wars since President Obama took office.

Sheehan called for a focus against the foreign policy employed by the White House, rather than a policy maker such as the President. She urged people to take a stand and do what is right for our brave young men and women who are putting their lives on the line for us. Keep us from being blinded by the Fog of War.

Fundraiser for Cindy at Trainer house. (l-r) Harold Trainer, Cindy Sheehan and Mike Aklin, father of Sgt. Mike Aklin II who was killed in the Iraq War in November 2003.

Harold Trainer, USAF, Maj. Ret., Vietnam Veteran, Business Instructor at Jefferson Community College, Louisville, KY. Lives in Prospect, KY.

Robin Long, America's first Active Duty GI War Resister to be extradited back to the US from Canada, receives a $500.00 check from the Vietnam Veterans Against the War National Office at his first public speaking engagement upon release after serving 15 months for Desertion in the Brig at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego from VVAW San Diego Contact Jan A. Ruhman, who along with Chuck "Mutt" Winnant and members of Veterans For Peace in San Diego, visited him each weekend while incarcerated.

CA Central Coast Chapter of VVAW: Something New Pays Off

Carolyn Crandall

The California Central Coast Chapter of VVAW staffed two booths at Street Fairs in Camarillo and Ventura, CA this summer. The first event was in the city of Ventura at their 4th of July Street Fair and the second one was the following weekend in Camarillo at their Fiesta Days celebration. In our third year at both of these events we wanted to do something different.

We put our heads together and came up with the idea of putting a map of Vietnam at the time the war was being waged in the booth. A good friend of ours who owns a print shop enlarged the map so the cities and areas were clearly visible. The guys propped it up on an easel, bought some pushpins in colors to represent the different branches of the military and began the task of encouraging passing veterans to come in and put the pin on the map where they were stationed. It was actually pretty easy to identify the veterans: Vietnam hats, gray beards, crinkles around the eyes and pot bellies. We didn't know how this would be received. To our amazement, it was the most popular item at our booth. There were some veterans who were hesitant at first, but after realizing that they were not alone and that they were welcomed in by our veterans; Steve, Jack and Carl, the discussions and conversations that ensued were most rewarding. There was laughter and sharing of stories and hugs and lots of shaking hands and big pats on the back.

What a shame that it was war that brought them all together; men who had never met, but left the booth feeling like they had met old friends.

We also put up posters describing PTSD and the suicides that are occurring today. Many people stopped to read the posters and we were surprised at how many had no idea about either condition. That's right, no idea. Some had never even heard of PTSD. To say that our population is not educated about these wars is an understatement.

Another idea that was floated by our members was to create a postcard with brief descriptions of the effects of war and address it to President Obama, asking him for his help in making sure our veterans get the help they need. We included a line for personal comments, and then offered to mail them off for the individuals or give them the postcard to mail themselves. Again, we were amazed at how many people participated in this exercise. Most let us mail them on their behalf. We drafted a letter to the President and mailed them off a few weeks after the events. Unfortunately, as of this writing, we have not received a response from the White House. He probably has a pretty full plate at this time.

At the booths we included flyers with descriptions of Agent Orange, PTSD, Stop Loss Orders and TBI, brochures from IVAW, VVAW, The Soldiers Project, Evan Ashcraft Foundation, and Veterans United for Truth. We also had our VVAW buttons, t-shirts, hats and peace stickers. The peace stickers were very popular, especially with the kids. On one side of our canopy we pinned up hand written posters talking about suicide and PTSD. The hand written posters seem to draw more attention then professionally printed posters.

Jim and Jane Bright (Jane is a Gold Star Mother) whose son was killed in 2003 in Iraq joined us at the booths. The Brights have started a foundation to bring awareness to the costs of war in their son's name: Evan Ashcraft Foundation. They bring another perspective on the broader issues and the cost of war and are a welcome addition to our group.

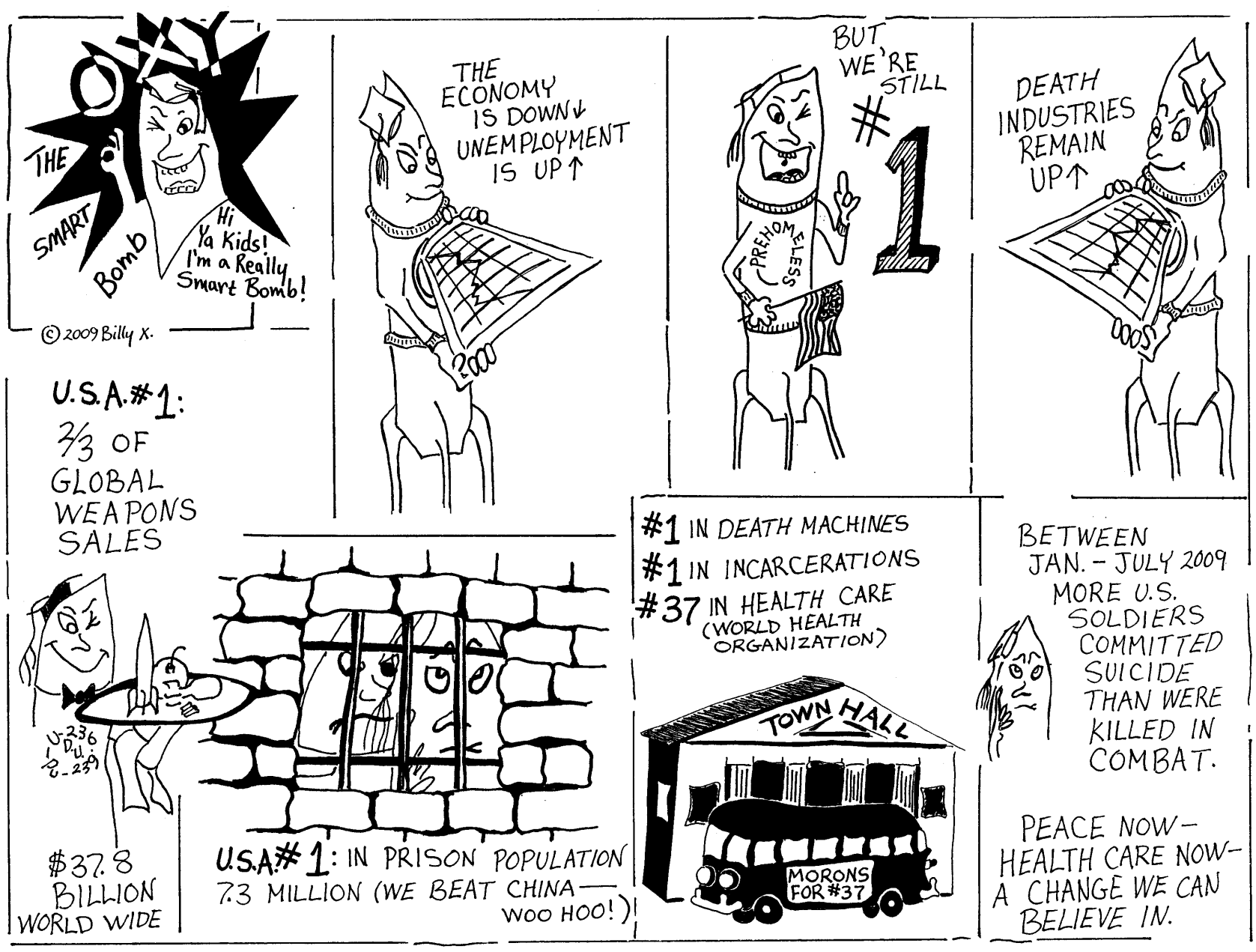
We met a woman whose mother is Vietnamese and her father an American soldier whom she never met. She spoke gently and kindly about him and wished she could have known him. She had a beautiful and kind way about her and thanked us for our efforts in bringing attention to the atrocities of war.

A veteran who couldn't talk to us allowed his daughter to speak with us. She told us that still to this day he cannot talk about his experience in Vietnam so she really doesn't know what happened.

An Iraq vet stopped by and told us he was about to deploy for his 7th tour, that's correct, 7 tours. He would be sent home for two or three months, then back to Iraq for 8 to 10 months and so on. He didn't know how long he would be gone this time.

Sometimes all it takes is one piece of familiarity, like the map of Vietnam, and you can bring old veterans together again.

Carolyn Crandall is a member of the California Central Coast Chapter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.



Pleiku Jacket

Once you've experienced the horrors of war, it seems you never can escape it. "There's Always Something There to Remind Me," as the early 60s song by Burt Bacharach and Hal David goes. Yesterday morning, for example, I was dumbstruck by an unexpected sharp reminder of what I experienced in the Central Highlands of Vietnam almost 42 years ago during the brutal Tet Offensive. There I was in Bread Alone, one of the tonier of tourist-filled establishments on the main street of my new hometown in Woodstock, NY, with a bagel and a latte. As I stirred raw sugar into the latte, I glanced back at an elegant 40-something woman placing her order.

BAM-POW – the air swooshed out of me as if I had been punched in the solar plexus. She was wearing a faded-green satin jacket emblazoned with the words, "Pleiku, Vietnam." One of the typical GI slogans of the day, "When I die I'll go to heaven because I've spent my time in hell!" encircled the colored embroidered image of South Vietnam.

I approached her, "Excuse me, but I ran supplies to Pleikiu in late 67, early 68. Are you the daughter of a Vet?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," she replied. "No, I went to high school in Manhattan in the early 80s, and there was a thrift store near the school that had lots of these jackets. A bunch of us bought them and wore them. We thought they were cool. I've kept mine after all these years and wear it from time to time."

Cool! ??? What could I say? Nothing really. So I wished her a good day and went out into the bright sunlight of a beautiful morning, deeply breathing away the dark images from that faraway place that never is too far away in memory.

—Thomas Brinson
Woodstock, NY

New Opportunities for Veterans and GI Counseling

Ray Parrish

The GI's, veterans and their families in your area need help and you don't need me to do it. There are new resources that will allow you to do veterans peer counseling, VA disability claims and help GI's understand their rights and how to get the best discharge possible. It's even possible for you to make a living doing these. And, of course, VVAW's counseling service is still just a phone call away and anyone can call for assistance. I'm talking about a new book, a new web-based manual and a new therapy training.

The *Veterans and Families Survival Guide* is downloadable from vfa.org, the website of Veterans For America (formerly the VVA Foundation). It's got over 200 pages written by a couple of dozen experts that discuss every relevant subject in a helpful manner. With this in your computer you'll be able to answer 95% of the questions and make yourself a reliable resource for your community. However, to take on VA disability claims (as a non-lawyer, independent agent who could get 20% of retro benefits) I still recommend the NVLSP's Veterans Benefits Manual (order thru Lexis-Nexis at 800-533-1637). It's worth the $245 for the 4000 pages and cd-rom because you get the VA's clinicians' guide and adjudication manual. In 1999 the appeals I wrote got vets $500,000 in retro benefits.

My new manual for GI counseling is *Rules of Disengagement – The Politics and Honor of Military Dissent* by the President of the National Lawyers Guild, Marjorie Cohen and the chair of NLG's Military Law Task Force, Kathleen Gilberd. (Polipoint Press; 415-339-4100 – p3books.com) It goes far beyond "Helping Out's" focus on discharges and gets into the nitty-gritty of helping GI's and their families who are dealing with racism, rape, issues of conscience, disabilities and the legality of today's wars. The girightshotline.org website has links to the regs on discharges and a new phone number 877-447-4487.

I went thru a week-long Veterans Peer Counselor training developed by the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance. (Coordinated by vet-netchicago.org at 800-826-3632, ext. 159) Both the VA and community mental health service agencies, thru HUD-VA Supportive Housing grants, are trying to provide returning vets more appropriate and extensive counseling. The training had vets from all eras as well as family members and service providers. Its consistent emphasis on helping veterans to help each other was a challenge for an old caseworker like me who is used to working with those who are so severely disabled they need help finding answers.

So, get a local contact from the IVAW or GI Rights Hotline website and reach out to them with an offer to help. Get your local library to buy a copy of the Veterans Benefits Manual and ask them to host regular VA claims and discharge upgrade clinics. Get your local VA get on the peer-counseling bandwagon. Get into the HUD-VASH program and buy an apartment building to house vets and a counselor.

JUST DO IT!

Ray Parrish (Sgt., USAF, 72-75) is VVAW's military counselor. If you need help, call him at 773-561-8829 or email him at camiblue@vvaw.org.

VVAW Military Counseling Services Expanded

VVAW Military Counseling Services expanded their services by hiring Johanna (Hans) Buwalda, a licensed counselor who has worked with war survivors for 20 years. She was a natural choice for this position since she had already volunteered for quite a while with IVAW and knew many veterans. Better yet, many veterans already knew to go see her with questions about trauma, adjustment, family issues, discharge upgrades, or if they simply wanted somebody to talk to. She has lived and worked in a war zone. Hans joined Ray Parrish, Sgt USAF 72-75, who is a certified veterans peer counselor with 30 years experience with VA claims. He is the son of a WWII/Vietnam Veteran.

Veterans, GIs, and their family members or friends:
Please call us if you or somebody you know:

· Need treatment, military discharge or compensation for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or other medical or mental conditions.
· Have been raped or abused and need treatment or help filing complaints.
· Are considered by the military to be a deserter or AWOL/UA.
· Are fighting unfair discharges for poor performance or misconduct.
· Are fighting a discharge for homosexuality or are being denied such a discharge.
· Have a conscience that won't allow fighting in a war and need advice on conscientious objection.
· Have military service that is a hardship for themselves or their families.
· Need help filing, supporting and winning VA Benefit Claims or appeals.
· Need help changing the character or reason on a military discharge.
· Want out of the military's Delayed Entry Program.
· Have any other questions or issues related to military service that you want to consult about.

We can be reached at:

VVAW Military Counseling Service
3411 West Diversey Avenue
Chicago, IL 60647
Ray Parrish (773) 561-8829 or camiblue@vvaw.org
Hans Buwalda (773) 370-4789 or info@storiesandart.com

All services are free and confidential

After Action Report: VVAW SE Regional Conference

Willie Hager

Sunday, August 16, 2009
The Hootch
VVA Chapter 96 Home
Tallahassee, Florida
July 24-26, 2009

Sponsored by the VVAW National Office and modeled on VVAW's West Coast Tour, the conference gathered SE Representatives of VVAW, IVAW, VFP, MFSO and progressive allies to identify strengths and weaknesses and to agree on mutual strategy. VVAW National was represented by Barry Romo and Marty Webster, National Coordinators. VFP sent Mike Hearington, VFP Chap 125, as SE representative. Jason Hurd, IVAW Chapter 55 & IVAW SE Regional Coordinator and Zach Choate, IVAW Chap 4 represented IVAW. MFSO sent a letter of support. VVA chapter 96 waived fees on The Hootch.

The Hootch was built on land donated by American Legion Sauls-Bridges Post 13, VVA Chapter 96 raised the funds, drew up plans and now manages it for the use of all veterans. Vietnam Veterans of Florida State Coalition chapters traveled to assist in construction. Our host, Rick Clevenger, President of VVA 96, was chairman of the building committee, Josh and Mac, Vietnam Veterans Of North Florida/VVAW First Coast, provided logistical support and me, VVNF/VVAW Organizing Coordinator all worked to make the Hootch a reality. To the four of us, this Conference was validation of over thirty years of struggle to build a unified Veterans front. We had come full circle. The spirit of the VVNF and Florida State Coalition motto; Together Then - Together Again, set the tone for this VVAW SE gathering.

Friday, a lazy summer evening at the Hootch, we got to know each other better over a few beers. A large time was had by all. On the front porch overlooking lovely Lake Ella, Jason broke out his fiddle, a musical backdrop with a folk bent. In what we refer to here as a boogie caucus, unity of purpose was reinforced. In addition to warming relations, we refined the agenda for the next day and gained knowledge of what was working at home and what wasn't.

Saturday's round table format was moderated by Willie Hager. Barry Romo made the opening remarks, followed by Marty Webster.

Barry spoke to VVAW's history of effective organizing around issues of social justice, Veterans rights and issue advocacy. VVAW led the fight for recognition of Post Vietnam Syndrome. PVS was recognized as an anxiety disorder in the DSM III and renamed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Barry put these struggles in context encouraging us to continue to adjust in a rapidly changing Obama anti-war and social justice model of grass-roots organizing. Veteran status gives us credibility with the American people and in military ranks. Barry suggested that we should hone our lobbying skills and take our message to congress. VVAW has had some major successes there. Three focal issues Barry offered were PTSD, Agent Orange and Sexual Abuse of Women in the Military. He reaffirmed a current priority mission to support IVAW's grass-roots movement.

Marty reinforced the need to present a united front. As he traveled the country and made personal contacts, he was impressed with the bonds that still remained in so many folk and their willingness to jump back in. Marty felt continued support of IVAW's actions and programs, and logistical support for their actions and events was our main job. He also spoke about PTSD and the need to restructure claim filing and mental health service delivery. PTSD is a societal ticking bomb. The number of new victims soaring out of control. Marty concluded his comments with his belief that the first step to an effective strategy was realistic goal setting.

IVAW SE Regional Coordinator, Jason Hurd, said IVAW was examining fresh strategies and tactics, looking to VVAW for continued support and to VVAW and VFP as mentors, as they rebuild their base following a year of internal strife. No problemo, all of us from the old school were graduates of similar processes within VVAW and VFP. He said IVAW's cohesiveness was strongest at the regional level and given good options and workable goals, the IVAW folks out in the more rural areas would rally.

Jason believes we need to unite around mutual issues and design and implement an outreach program. He felt IVAW's strongest capacities are just outside the gates of the major military installations in the Southeast and that we should begin our initial campaign there. Recognizing the power of the Winter Soldier testimonies in raising consciousness within our communities and email networks; Jason thought we should consider presenting a major WS in the Southeast. He believes VVAW and IVAW should research certification. Assertive advocacy is a very real need of returning Veterans, as they try and thread their way through the nightmare world of Veterans claim law. The current crop of VSOs, is on par with public defenders; underpaid, understaffed and under enthused.

Mike Hearington and Mike Burke work with the Georgia Veterans Alliance to build a network of Veterans. Shared resources are the key to the day-to-day quality of life issues for returning Veterans. With the Atlanta IVAW they also work closely with the National Association of Black Veterans (NABVET), a grassroots Veterans self help group that is certified as a (VSO). Mike said that their most successful direct outreach tactic is working the Atlanta Airport, welcoming returning GI's home, providing leaflets, brochures and resource references to aid them with readjustment to life back in the world. VFP and VVAW, there in Hotlanta, are also actively campaigning for GI Rights, specifically with regard to counter recruiting on campus and ROTC in public schools. They also distribute a great new online and hard copy VFP newspaper, the *War Crimes Times*. Well written, factual and in dead earnest. Read all about it! Oh, yeah, it's a blog, too; so, have at it with your personal take on things.

Mike Hearington presented on Mike Burke's behalf. Issues for them, were the School Of The Americas Vigil in November, GI Rights Outreach and counter recruiting.

The focal issues that floated to the surface of our discussions were those that were directly related to Veterans, their families, quality of life, following the trauma of suffering, or having resisted, or even having spoken out about, combat in foreign lands based on false premises and outright lies. There was a consensus in the room, that ideological struggles, internally and externally were a distraction to organizational or strategic effectiveness, in that they created divisiveness, rather than unity of purpose.

Here are the issues that were mutually agreed should be anchors of our grass-roots outreach campaign in the Southeast:

GI Rights and Counter Recruiting – to include continued support of COs such as Robin Long; development of counter high school ROTC programs; development of a Winter Soldier panel of recruiters, and what Jason called Base Building - the establishment of outreach facilities in close proximity to major military installations, which caters to both active duty military and local Veterans. A comfortable place to hang, providing access to local programs and services for Veterans and their families.

Sexual Abuse of Women in the Military – Development of Womens affinity groups, what we used to call "rap groups," or

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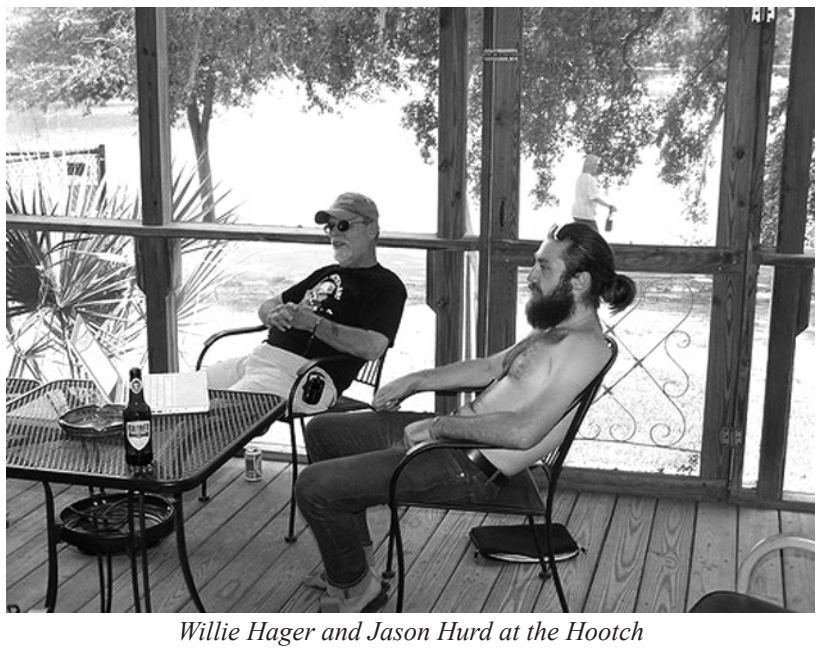

Willie Hager and Jason Hurd at the Hootch

After Action Report

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perhaps, womens writing groups. Development of a Winter Soldier panel of Women Veterans who have suffered sexism or sexual assault while in the military, but especially in the combat zones. Support of the actions of currently organized Womens Veteran groups.

Veterans Immigration and Citizenship Issues – This issue has already taken off in SoCal, with VVAW, VFP, IVAW and MFSO actively supporting the established defense committee, which recently raised funds to travel to the VFP National Convention and to lobby congressional representatives in Washington, DC.

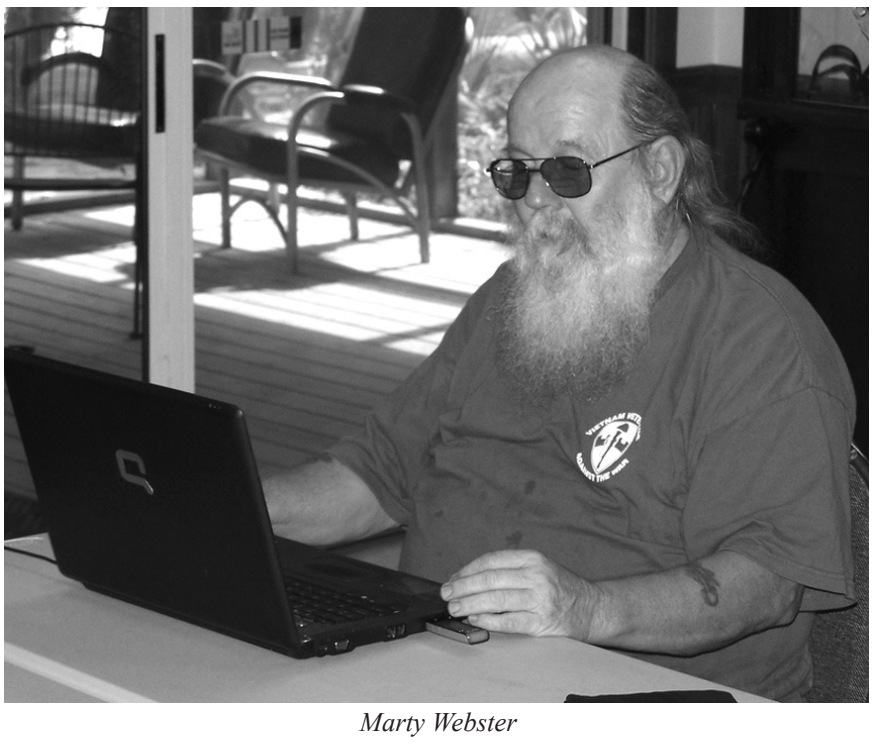
PTSD Outreach and Program Development – direct Veterans to already successful grass-roots programs; redefine the current diagnosis and services delivery models from mentally oriented, to socially oriented.

VA – reform of Claims Division to an advocacy (not adversarial screening) agency; reform of the mental health delivery system; reform VocRehab educational payment system and incorporate it into the VA Disability payment matrix, rejecting its current, counter-productive practices. This would include reform of periodic certification procedures to be more user friendly for the Veteran; continued support of actions that call attention to the VAs reckless management of our affairs and properties; reform of current Veterans outreach models regarding benefits and claims support, and increased direct access to the claims process by the Veteran.

It was acknowledged that issues of ideology and political philosophy needed to be regularly tuned up and that this is the concern of National Steering Committees or Executive Boards rather than as make or break grass-roots dogma. Outreach should not require a political oath or pledge, in order to be implemented on a Veteran's behalf, anymore than anyone ought to have to say a prayer, to get food and a bed at a homeless shelter; all that should be required, is that they have a genuine need of the benefit, or service. As long as the outreach is undertaken within the goals and mission of the organization; the actions should speak much more loudly than the accompanying words, in order for them to be successful. Build it, and they will come.

Actions, not words, are the fuel of successful Veterans outreach.

In that spirit, it was resolved by those present that we would form an organizing committee, made up of VVAW, IVAW and VFP reps. That group would develop an itinerary for directly reaching areas where we had capacity and assisting with chapter and/or program development. We would share our suggestions, and proposals of mutual tactics, when we next met. At the moment, that will be in Savannah, Georgia, at a GI Outreach forum being sponsored and hosted by the Savannah Chapter of IVAW Labor Day weekend.



Marty Webster

At this point it seemed that we had accomplished our stated mission; we had joined forces, agreed on unified principles, had begun constructing an infra-structure, and a strategy for providing meaningful self-help information and programs, as well as having initiated an active plan for mutual chapter and membership building for each of our organizations.

A very long and productive day, and we could smell the ribs smokin', just outside the door...do I hear a motion? Actually, I heard a rumble; time to call it a day, here at the office. To the Hootch for a rib dinner, liquid refreshment and an evening of one on one, relaxing on the porch, overlooking Lake Ella, on a long, balmy, southern summer evening. As the sun set, Jason picked on his fiddle as we talked, long into the night, forming lasting friendships and celebrating our mutually achieved accomplishments.

Together Then...
Together Again...

Willie Hager is currently the Administrative Coordinator and Contributing Editor of www.VetSpeak.org. He is a proud member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

Report From The Rear

Gregory Ross

In 1966 I flunked out of night school. I got my "greetings" before the official "failed" notice from the college. I worked full time days; went to school full time nights and was triple time frightened of going to war. I was as ignorant as most of my friends about geopolitics, though. I couldn't have found Vietnam on a map to save my life [pun intended].

The day after I got my draft notice, I went to the Navy recruiter. He laughed and said, "You got lucky, son. The Department of Defense tells us when we can take draftees. Yesterday the answer was, No!!" So, I signed on the dotted line and went home to face my mother's fear wrapped in wrath and make my father proud. My father had served in the Navy in WWII as a tail gunner. Two planes he was on were shot down, plus he was on a ship that was sunk. One of those times he spent 17 hours in a life raft on the Pacific with one other man who died before rescue. He never took another bath after that, just showers.

He stayed in the Reserves and was called up for Korea. That war he was assigned to a Marine unit. He told only one story and he told it only once but, it made his 6 foot 2 inch, 230 pounds of muscle shake with anger for an officer who shot one of his men in the back as he ran from his first firefight. If anyone called my father "Sir," he would bark, "Don't call me that, I can read and write." He hated officers.

I had hoped that the Navy would save me from Vietnam and combat. It mostly did. My first duty station was in Morocco where I had an incident involving a large knife, the word Infidel, and my ability to run fast. Once I was fired upon by the Moroccan police: wrong place, bad timing but, lucky.

My next duty station was the Philippine Islands; a comparatively peaceful experience on a small communications base. Liberty was in Olongapo City/Subic Bay. We got stoned and listened to cover bands of late sixties rock. Inevitably, I pissed off my duty officer and was sent out T.A.D. [Temporary Axillary Duty] with the 7th Fleet, most of it on what the Navy called the "Gun Line": aircraft carriers, battleships, cruisers and support ships floating off the coast of Vietnam. I was assigned to two cruisers while out at sea: the Saint Paul and the Newport News, both with 16 inch guns capable of throwing 2,000 pound shells up to 20 miles, what the Marines called "freight trains." Part of my job was to keep the lines of communication open to place the shells. Do it right, people died; do it wrong, people died. Done right or wrong, almost unfathomable amounts of destruction.

Although I never set foot on the soil of Vietnam, I got much closer to combat than I had hoped when I signed up. The 16 inch guns, one deck above my work and sleeping spaces left me with a severe case of "startle response." But the most troubling experience I dealt with didn't happen to me.

In the Philippine Islands, the police are part of the military. No "Para-Military" euphemisms for them. The Philippine Constabulary, at least when I was stationed there, were powerful and corrupt. Olongapo City had a Bazaar selling almost anything you thought you might need. No surprise: the Bazaar also functioned as a Black Market where you could buy almost anything else you thought you might need, as long as you didn't get caught. And it was surprisingly easy to not get caught even though it was patrolled by Shore Patrol, Military Police and the Philippine Constabulary.

The Seventh Fleet was in that day so there were many thousands of sailors in their dress whites all over Olongapo City. A Fleet sailor had just bought a wristwatch and a few steps from the seller a girl about 10 years old grabbed the watch and ran. He yelled and a Philippine Constabulary raised his weapon, shot her, then walked over to the body, picked up the watch and with a big smile sauntered back to the shocked sailor and proudly handed it to him.

Floating off the coast of Vietnam I knew that those 2,000 pound shells were killing people and animals; destroying villages and rice paddies or just pure jungle but, never had to see it. The girl was the first person I had seen killed so violently and so senselessly. I had hoped that the Navy would save me from combat. Mostly, it did.

Gregory Ross is a Navy veteran who served off coast of Vietnam, 1968-69. He's a graduate of a VA drug, alcohol and PTSD program [1980]. He's a Licensed Acupuncturist [detoxification specialty, 1989] He has published in Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace. *Avoids haircuts, shaving.*

58,195

We built a wall for 58,195.
They built cemeteries for millions.

We stand back and admire our shiny black slash,
hurling away, as so much worthless trash,
the lessons we could have learned.

The embossed names have morphed now
into those who died in vain
while we shit on their sacrifices and
despise all who would disagree.

—Tim Bagwell

Tim Bagwell served in Vietnam from January to July 1969 with Bravo, 1/9, 3rd Marine Div. He was pulled out when Nixon pulled out the first 25,000 troops that summer. He was assigned to 8th and I and later was appointed the orderly to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, then Navy Admiral Thomas Moorer. He joined VVAW and participated in Dewey Canyon III—Dewey Canyon I was his first operation in Vietnam. He is a life time member of VVAW and continues to wear a peace pin daily.

The Hero

A long time ago
I received the Purple Heart
and
two Bronze Stars,
strange,
seeing as how
today
I have difficulty
summoning the courage
to face the cruel
emptiness
of doing
a load of laundry
or making
a piece of toast.

—Paul Hellweg

Paul Hellweg has a bad case of official, government-sanctioned, VA-approved PTSD. He is a member of both Veterans for Peace and Vietnam Veterans Against the War, and he has recently devoted his life to speaking out against all war.

Kent State 40th Anniversary

Bruce Hyland

In recent years VVAW has passed milestones such as it's 40th anniversary in 2007. This next spring May 4, 2010 will be the 40th anniversary for the shootings at Kent State. The 40th for the Jackson State shooting will follow on May 14. From the time these shootings occurred there has been an annual remembrance and a dedicated struggle to find the truth surrounding these grim events which are a part of our history. Through these 40 years VVAW with a local chapter at Kent and at the National Office have supported Kent State/Jackson State in a number of ways at different times. Placing their bodies on the line for a cause such as the gym struggle and participating in all types of remembrance events. Providing recognition to those students, KSU faculty and concerned citizens connected to the Kent State shootings who've worked continually to find the truth. Or giving financial support to the new Kent State Visitors Center. VVAW has remained connected and a partner to Kent State/Jackson State.

Upon the approach of the 30th anniversary a past article from the 1999 Fall/Winter issue of *The Veteran* by a former National Coordinator and dear friend Bill Davis entitled "Tin Soldiers and Nixon's Army: Murder at Kent State" does a very good job describing the political atmosphere around these shootings *(see next page)*.Through the years we've had many from VVAW (too many to acknowledge here) give their time, energy, and even blood at Kent State. It is in this spirit that

we hope to have a large contingent of VVAW at the 40th in Kent on May 2-5, 2010, with a kick-off concert at the Crystal Ballroom in Cleveland on May 1.The relevance of May 4, 1970 could not be more clear. The lessons to be learned have not been completed. The truth has yet to find it's way. War has not ended.

Bruce Hyland, Infantryman, Honor Guard, E/1/3 TOG.

Operation Blanket Hill - VVAW at Kent State 20th Anniversary, 1990

Tin Soldiers and Nixon's Army: Murder At Kent State

Bill Davis

Reprinted from the Fall 1999 issue of The Veteran.

"As the Ohio law says, use any force that's necessary, even to the point of shooting. We don't want to get into that, but the law says we can if necessary." - Major General Sylvester Del Corso at a press conference, May 3, 1970

On April 30, 1970, Richard Nixon doubled back on his promise to end the war in Vietnam by expanding the visible conflict and invading Cambodia, a neutral country. The American people, visibly tired of the ongoing conflict, reacted against the expansion of the war. Still unaware of the massive secret bombings of Laos and Cambodia, the anti-war movement reacted strongly to this new expansion. College campuses across the country were at the forefront of these actions.

The political mood in Ohio and the events leading up to Kent State mirrored those of the nation. Labor unrest, civil rights struggles, and anti-war activities simmered and then boiled over in the spring of 1970.

In Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus, the African-American communities fought for recognition, and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters called a statewide strike against the trucking industry, then went on to brutally punish the Ohio National Guard for interceding on behalf of trucking concerns. In Columbus, Ohio State University, on the day of its one hundredth anniversary, was plunged into two weeks of violent street fighting when Ohio State police and Columbus city police attacked a peaceful demonstration at the gates of the university. The students were asking for black studies programs and an end to the war. Before the university was closed for the balance of the spring term, hundreds of students and community residents were wounded and injured in the fighting that raged before and after the events at Kent State. Before the second week in May, every major college or university in Ohio was closed and occupied by police and National Guard forces.

By late April, Kent, Ohio, a small college town in northern Ohio, had begun to stir politically. With many students gone for the first weekend in May, student activists on campus pressed forward protesting the war. Off campus, some students and "townies" confronted police, and went on a trashing binge in the bar district on the evening of May 1. Though unrelated to any movement political activities on campus, the mayor of Kent, Leroy Satron, contacted Ohio governor Rhodes, requesting that National Guard forces be sent and stating that SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) had taken control of a part of the city of Kent. With absolutely no basis in fact, forces yet unseen had been set in motion.

By May 2, elements of the Ohio National Guard, Troop G of the 2nd Company, 107th Armored Cavalry and companies A&C of the 145th Infantry Regiment had arrived in Kent. They entered the campus area of Kent State University without authorization, following the burning of the ROTC building on the same evening. Subsequent investigation of the fire by the authorities failed to place any blame on a specific group, student or otherwise. The university at no time requested the presence of the National Guard and later investigation revealed that the Portage County Sheriff's Department and the Ohio State Police felt that there was no overt threat on campus.

The Ohio National Guard units brought to Kent had problems of their own. Fresh from the teamster strike in the Cleveland area, these particular guardsmen were battered, beaten and exhausted. Ironically, fresh Guard units, specially trained for riot duty, were stationed nearby, sitting unused.

The day and evening of May 3 saw an escalating spiral of violence as the Guard units began to teargas and bayonet groups of students whenever they tried to gather. Addressing the assembled Guard troops that evening, Governor Rhodes took the stage, saying, "No one is safe in Portage County. It is just that simple. No one is safe, and I do not believe that people understand the seriousness of these individuals who are organized in a revolutionary frame of mind." Coupled with earlier statements of National Guard officers promising an armed response to student demonstrations, the stage was set for the tragic events of May 4.

After a morning filled with confrontation and Guard marches, the fatal events unfolded. At 12:24 P.M., a group of guardsmen marched up Blanket Hill near Taylor Hall, turned in an orderly line, raised their weapons and fired on the students, some as far away as 390 feet. When the firing stopped, four students lay dead: Jeff Miller, Allison Krause, Bill Schroeder, and Sandy Scheuer. Thirteen others were wounded, several so severely that they are disabled to this day.

The national outcry against these shootings brought massive demonstrations around the country, closing hundreds of colleges and universities, and culminating in giant anti-war marches on both coasts. The intention to stifle the student movement had backfired, energizing it further. Ohio politicians moved to cover up the murders. Indictments were brought against the wounded students, charging them with responsibility for the events. Subsequent investigations by the FBI and the Justice Department, while hardly sympathetic to the students, clearly pointed the finger of guilt at the guardsmen, their officers, and the governor. The Ohio government moved as quickly as possible to stage a grand jury, pre-empting any federal jury of the same type, with the full cooperation of the Nixon administration. The guilty walked.

Ten days after the Kent State shootings, Mississippi state police shot two students to death at Jackson State University in South Carolina. Turning from the black communities and inner cities across the country, brute force and legalized murder became the order of the day on campus as well. Using the Law Enforcement Assistance Act (LEAA), Nixon handed out billions of dollars to police forces everywhere, arming them with weapons developed for the war in Indochina and creating an instant network of paramilitary forces, in effect a national police force. Vice President Spiro T. Agnew proudly proclaimed, "We have buried the student movement in the US." Nothing could have been further from the truth.

The anti-war and minority rights movements were unbowed and grew stronger from the experiences. The decade that followed included year after year of rallies and demonstrations at Kent State. The Ohio State Police assumed the role of the heavies, beating, bashing and gassing participants year after year. We in VVAW were always there. The "Struggle to Stop The Gym," which was to be built on the spot where the students died, was the scene of particularly vicious attacks by the university and state police. Fortunately, as time has passed, the annual events at Kent have drawn a much more reasonable response from the university. The 15th, 20th and 25th commemorations have gone easier.

Thanks to the unflagging commitment and support of the Kent State students, the programs have continued over the years. VVAW has kept its commitment to help keep the spirit of Kent State alive over the years. Beginning in 1970, when vets founded the Kent Chapter of VVAW, up to the present, we have seen the importance of remembering the events of Kent State 1970 for the student movement of today

Bill Davis was a Vietnam vet and former US Air Force Staff Sgt. Davis was a member of VVAW for over 35 years. He passed away in 2007.

Operation Blanket Hill - VVAW at Kent State 20th Anniversary, 1990

A Message from Jose Vasquez, Executive Director of IVAW

To my brothers and sisters in VVAW,

On behalf of IVAW, I want to reach out to VVAW and its supporters with a message of solidarity. During these challenging times, when our national leaders are contemplating escalation in Afghanistan it is more important than ever that we coordinate our efforts to bring about a just peace. Together we are the voice of conscience challenging wrong-headed policies that are destroying the lives of American troops and Iraqi and Afghan civilians.

I came on board as ED this August, right before our national convention, and it's been a challenging transition to say the least. Although 2008 was a big year for us, we entered this fiscal year with a lot of catching up to do financially. Thanks to your support, we were able to get our organizing program off the ground, hiring three full time organizers. However, we are not out of the woods yet and we'll need to focus on fundraising if we are going to continue our successes in 2010. There is much work to be done!

Our national office will be moving to New York City, where VVAW got it's start. We feel the opportunities to network with foundations and have access to media will be enhanced by this move. In the meantime, our members continue to do amazing things.

Our book *Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan* was translated into Japanese and is doing well overseas. Members toured major cities in Japan sharing their personal accounts of the wars and occupations.

We had two members travel to Erbil, Iraq for the first national labor conference. Following that, we co-sponsored an Iraqi Labor Tour with US LAW and helped raise money for their solidarity fund.

Members marched at the G20 summit in Pittsburgh and held an action at the Soldiers and Sailors memorial that received local and national coverage.

By the time you read this, we will have field organizers down at Fort Hood conducting training for members down there doing GI outreach and support. Simultaneously, we have numerous events planned for our Afghanistan Awareness Month campaign where we are encouraging members and supporters to host screenings, teach-ins, and other activities to educate the public about the "good war."

These are just a few of the exciting things IVAW is working on right now. Stay tuned to our website. If you like what we're doing and want to see it flourish, consider becoming a sustaining donor by clicking the "Donate" button on the site to set up a recurring donation.

In solidarity,

Jose Vasquez
Executive Director
Iraq Veterans Against the War

Jason Hurd at G20 protest

Geoff Millard, interm chair of the IVAW board, speaking with union leaders at the first forum of the Iraq Labor Tour in Washington DC

The Decision to Hold the G20 Summit in My Home Town

Joyce Wagner

The decision to hold the G20 summit in my hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania was announced in late May and came as a huge surprise to everyone here. To me, taking action seemed obvious, but how? Our chapter was brand new and had only 3 members. We spent many hours from late May until the summit and beyond working closely with Veterans for Peace, Codepink and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. We engaged in battles for permits and wondered what would happen if, for any number of reasons, our efforts in organizing around the G20 failed.

Although we collaborated with other local groups on marches and tent cities, we decided it would be best to do a creative, direct action with members of IVAW, VVAW and VFP. Throughout the planning process, we made it a priority to constantly consider the relationship between our cause (ending the war) and the G20. We ultimately determined that our message would best be served through a creative and interactive living memorial at the Soldier's and Sailor's Memorial Hall. We made large stencils stating, "We will not kill for your profit," and "We will not sacrifice for your profit," that made our message simple and clear. Early morning, Friday, September 25, we transferred these messages to the sidewalk in front of the hall, mud instead of paint symbolizing the dirty treatment of veterans both in the war and upon their return.

During the following speakout, veterans from various wars told stories about what they had sacrificed in the name of profit, followed by an affirmation that they would not be sacrificing for profit anymore. This was followed by a moment of silence to allow people to reflect upon what had been sacrificed. When the moment of silence ended, we asked that participants write their thoughts about these sacrifices on the sidewalk using chalk.

Leading up to the G20, I engaged in a number of discussions with other organizers in the city concerning the role of the police, National Guard (who deployed to Pittsburgh in order to help with security) and demonstrators. I believed then and still believe now that humanizing and individualizing members of the police force and National Guard is significantly more effective than engaging them combatively. It creates a greater likelihood of gaining allies and expanding membership, which in turn creates a larger movement. As veterans, this is a concept that should be familiar to us. On September 24, the first day of the summit, I joined 4 other members of IVAW in a walk around the city to engage in discussion with members of the National Guard on duty that morning. An action important not only because of the outreach to the soldiers on duty, but because it served as a reminder that we are not so different from them, even now.

The action itself, as well as the process of organizing, was successful for several reasons. Our chapter's membership has more than doubled. Planning the action and successfully following through significantly built the confidence of our membership. We were able to develop new local allies and strengthen those that we already had made. Bringing members to Pittsburgh and being able to engage creatively with one another was a very positive experience as well.

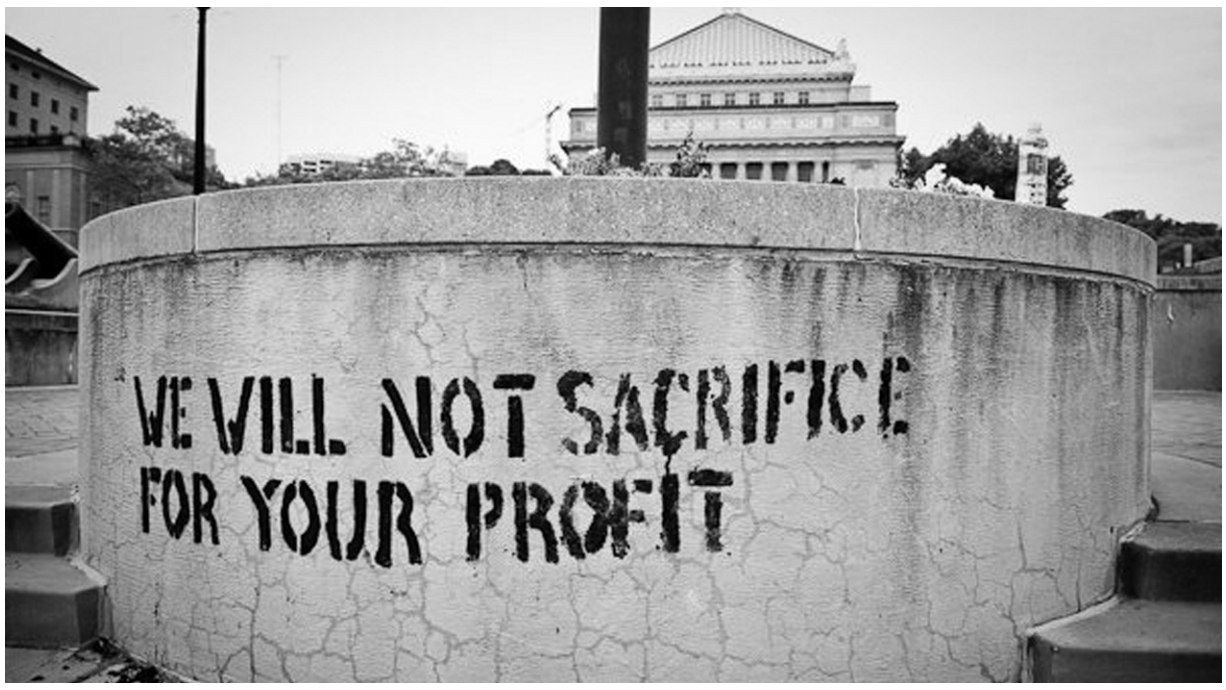
I believe that the memorial that we held successfully conveyed our message to those who were present. In extremely close proximity to the University of Pittsburgh's student union, dormitories and the Cathedral of Learning, we were able to reach a large number of students who we may not have reached if we had planned an action on another day or in a different location. We worked within the framework of the memorial rather than confronting it. This was very important. The memorial states that it is

Chantelle Bateman

there to "honor all those who have served." We weren't attempting to dishonor anyone; we were just adding another layer to the memorial by pointing out that their loss was for the profit of the few. This, along with our own identity as veterans seemed to make our message more legitimate to our audience.

One very obvious drawback that is becoming ever more apparent is the distraction caused by the summit. People became so engrossed in organizing around the summit, obtaining permits, fighting for free speech and other problems, that focus was shifted away from the larger issue at hand, namely working to end the war. Large numbers of demonstrators, students, media and medics (including IVAW member Jeff Bartos from Connecticut) were wrongly arrested. Rubber bullets, tear gas and sound cannons were among weapons used by the police for crowd control. Although this is a serious issue, local peace and social justice groups and activists have become so embroiled in a quest for justice against the police that the anniversary of the war in Afghanistan went by more or less unnoticed. Groups plan to hold a generic protest on October 17, but continue to relate it to the G20, stating, "G20 riot cops will not keep us silent." For our chapter, I would like to think that the G20 event has come and gone, preparing us for bigger and better things – things that are aimed at ending the war.

Joyce Wagner served in Iraq as a marine and is currently the Chapter President of IVAW's newest chapter, Chapter 63 in Pittsburgh.



Sullivan Campaign '09: Part 1

Joshua Noehrenberg

On May 16th, 2009, local organizers from Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), Veterans For Peace (VFP), Labor Beat and American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), just to name a few, gathered in Kresge Hall at Northwestern University to engage in a series of discussions on what it means to demilitarize the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). David Solnit, a long-time organizer with Courage to Resist, and a pioneer of the use of Puppetry at the November 1999 protests against the WTO, led us in a workshop on building a campaign against the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) and military academies, which combine to make the Chicago Public School system the most militarized in the nation. At the end of the session, we set a next meeting time and date, and allotted ourselves several research assignments.

Over the next two months, the Demilitarized U (DU) coalition ebbed and flowed throughout a cycle of bi-monthly meetings. During our one hour sessions, we quickly discovered evidence that the JROTC program in Chicago did not affect graduation rates, when all other factors remained constant, in some cases, gangs formed within the JROTC units, and, perhaps, worst of all, the program functioned as a very important recruitment tool for the Department of Defense (DOD), as anywhere from 30-52% of cadets enlist in the military. So, we begin to craft an ever more detailed strategy and message, started speaking out at the monthly Chicago Board of Education meetings and decided to stop the JROTC from coming into Sullivan high school in Rogers Park, since it was on the waitlist for the DOD's approval.

As we prepared to outreach on the first day of school, September 8th, 2009, we learned that Sullivan no longer remained on the waitlist. Instead, this year marks its first trial-phase at Sullivan high school. This means that if the program gains enough cadets (120), then further implementation will follow. Thus, our goal went from blocking the implementation of JROTC at Sullivan to discrediting it and discouraging students from joining. Most of us feel the need to help provide an alternative.

During the first-day-of-school outreach effort, we received a lot of positive feedback. Although we knew there was opposition, and that violence is a major factor behind the adoption of JROTC at Sullivan, 10 of us arrived at 6:20am, passed out 700 informational leaflets, and gathered contact information from 10 students, 5 parents, 1 teacher, and 3 neighbors, all of whom are willing to help us help them eliminate the program. As kids funneled into the only entrance to the school, many folks expressed their gratitude for our efforts with a heartfelt "thank you," or a friendly honk from their car horn, while our opposition just sat inside and grinned.

Over the next weeks, we followed up with our contacts and outreached to more folks after school. During these visits, we learned of the affect of our efforts. Students told us that their teachers addressed our presence in class and warned them about the negative side of military service. Teacher's notified us that they posted our leaflet in classrooms and break rooms. Parents informed us they will ensure their child does not enroll in JROTC. Neighbors displayed signs saying "No JROTC At Sullivan." Along with these achievements, by the end of the month, we gathered valid contact information from 25 students, 5 teachers, 4 parents, and 5 neighbors.

However, at the "good news" portion of the September 23rd, 2009, Board of Education meeting, retired US Army Colonel Rick Mills, joined by three CPS students, expressed their gratitude for allowing recent Medal of Honor recipients to visit Chicago Schools. While at least two students with him showed less than enthusiastic, original responses, by the end of their fifteen minutes, even the president of the Chicago Board of Education, Michael W. Scott, admitted that these visits came as a surprise. As a young cadet shadowed the president during this meeting, the theme of militarism remained readily apparent. So when our turn arrived, we got two minutes and Joleen Kirschenman, our presenter, delivered an awesome speech. As soon as she said that when you are in the military, "you either kill, or support those who kill," I noticed the young cadet react with disgust, shaking her head slightly, as if she swallowed something not as pleasing to the ear as the words, "valor," "honor," or "commitment."

In October, we invited our contacts to an initial strategy meeting at the United Church of Rogers Park, not more than three blocks from Sullivan. While only two parents showed up (along with most of the coalition members), several students, a teacher, and two neighbors expressed a deep interest in participating but could not make the meeting. However, of the two parents, one of them is an elected member to the Local School Council (LSC) at Sullivan, and volunteered to bring the JROTC issue up at the next LSC meeting, as well as report back on how the other members feel about it.

This all means that if we can build enough popular resistance to the program over the next couple of months, there is a strong possibility the LSC will instruct the principal to shut it down. Also, if our coalition comes to a consensus and can begin to craft an alternative simultaneously, then there is an equally strong chance that we can get $10,000 from the Cross Roads Fund in March for the start up. Perhaps, more importantly, if we can build long-term relationships with everyone involved, then we can keep the pressure on, and move onto the next school without losing what we gained.

Joshua Noehrenberg served in the United States Army Illinois National Guard as an infantry soldier (11B) from 2000 to 2005 until honorably discharged under chapter 10. He deployed with C 1/178th to Germany, Poland, and Ft. Polk, LA (USA) during the Global War on Terror (GWT).

IVAW Field Organizing Report

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in their schools. Mental health care – Many are working to get better care from the VA. A primary concern is the long waiting period to process claims. Some chapters have set up alternative health care networks outside of the VA. Afghanistan - The LA chapter has begun an effort to further discussion around Afghanistan using the *Rethink Afghanistan* film. This is an opportunity to highlight the experiences of the many members who served in Afghanistan.

Training sessions were held at the IVAW convention. The Regional Strategy and Leadership Training the Wednesday before the convention was a major success. Over thirty chapter leaders were present. The training had specific goals: introduce and build support for IVAW's organizing model, develop an understanding of strategic leadership and campaign development, including how to take a local issue to the next level, and to assess chapter projects. Energized members stayed three extra hours to continue sharing and working.

In September, we brought on the first four field organizers kicking off week long training sessions in Philadelphia and Baltimore. With Training for Change, United Workers of Baltimore and others, the group focused on establishing a clear understanding of the basics (one on one, new member orientation, facilitation, leadership development, campaign development) and setting strategic priorities for the FOT with clear goals and a time line.

East Coast Meta-Regional Organizer Chantelle Bateman from Washington, DC was in the Marine Corp for six years, has worked with IVAW for over a year and has been DC Chapter President.

She writes regarding her values as an organizer: "I look to history to lay out a map to the answers. This time it was the Black Panther Party's 10-Point 'What We Want-What We Believe' platform. #10 - We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace. But even my favorite freedom fighters left me feeling like something was missing. I think it is the words 'for all.' Not just for all Black people as demanded by the BPP or even just for all American's as alluded to in our country's founding documents. Both tragedy and joy have shown me the sameness in people and I have come to value the equality of all life and the kind of fierce defense of life borne out of love and not fear. No matter what experience brought us to this organization that each of us came to this work because we wanted to love a little better and we want to use that love to protect life. I have only been an activist for a short while and I am grateful to have received the best advice I could possibly receive very early. We are short term beings up against long term problems. I value the patience it takes to hold on and keep pushing until 'for all' comes even if that means I won't get to see it."

Southeast Regional Organizer Jason Hurd is from Savannah, GA and has acted as a regional coordinator for the southwest region for the past year. Jason is 100 percent disabled (PTSD) but volunteers his time to the Field Organizing Program.

Jason Hurd writes regarding his values as an organizer: "As a mature, thinking and somewhat rebellious individual, I like thinking that I own ultimate responsibility for the person I become - a moral premise not unlike the presidential cliché, 'the buck stops here.' This premise motivates my life in fundamental ways: it encourages me to implement strong ethical principles in my life and inspires me to organize military service members and veterans. The premise is bold and almost arrogant - it says, 'I can defy anything to become the person I want to be. I can help others become who they want be, no matter what. Bring it on.' Yet despite asserting my own self-governance, two major experiences have fundamentally shaped my values independently of my own will and I cannot escape their combined influence even if I want to: my Appalachian upbringing and my military service in Iraq. "

"I take many values from my life in the hills of East Tennessee; among them are simplicity, candor, compassion, resilience, solidarity and a healthy dose of skepticism for the ruling elite. While these values underpin much of Appalachian culture, they also underpin American culture more largely. Problematically, my combat experience shows me what happens when our decision makers act against these values."

"While serving as an Army medic in Iraq in 2005, I saw the destruction caused by an ever-expanding occupation, confusion caused by bad intelligence from 'higher up,' unquestioned racism against the Iraqi people and an unwillingness to question the ever-changing whims of our political elite. Now after nearly a decade of US occupation in the Middle East, we see what our foreign policy aspirations have done: over a million lives lost, innocent families and homes are destroyed and the non-Western world sees the US as the chief architect of suffering throughout the world. As Americans, we must assume responsibility when our representatives act against our most fundamentally held values. I assume that responsibility by organizing GI's and veterans - they implement our country's foreign policy around the world and should therefore have a powerful voice regarding the direction of our country."

The Southwest Meta-Regional Organizer Joe Callan is a Native brother from Albuquerque, New Mexico who served twelve years in the Marine Corps. He has leadership experience in the military and in grassroots organizing. In his short time out of the military he has managed a field crew for the AFL-CIO Working America and assisted the director of the Native American Community Academy. He writes: "I've never tried to pin down my values all at once before. I've had them told to me for the vast majority of my adult life, and they've been able to fit on an index card I could carry in my left breast pocket. For me a good place to start would be the IVAW Values statement."

Leadership: Great leaders develop new leaders. We strive to inspire a sense of initiative, hope and direction. Leaders have the discipline to do what is best for the cause and the interest of the organization. We will lead by example.

Honesty: We will ensure the transparency of the organizing team by openly communicating all of our intentions and goals to the membership while respecting the privacy of individual members and protecting our organization legally. Our statements will reflect the truth to the greatest possible degree.

Courage: We face our challenges with selfless devotion to our convictions. We will demonstrate the commitment to face adversity and oppose corruption, fraudulence and oppression despite personal consequence.

Respect: We will exemplify behavior that is professional, compassionate and ethical. We will practice the tolerance and understanding necessary to build community.

Integrity: We will deliver what we say and say what we deliver.

The Central Meta-Regional Organizer and Organizing Team Leader is Aaron Hughes. He joined IVAW in 2006 and has been a Chapter President, a Regional Coordinator, Board Member and Organizer. He helped found the Winter Soldier Project, the Warrior Writers Project, Operation First Casualty and the Chicago Chapter. He is tasked with building a national Field Organizing Program.

Aaron writes: "I was raised on stories of American values of freedom and democracy that crumbled in the reality of our dehumanization and oppression of the Iraqis. I wanted to destroy all the talking points and five-second sound bites and slow things down. Demand that people think about what we do and continue to do everyday to others. Expose the destruction of our own humanity through our involvement in the destruction and oppression of others. My own experience had no power to make social changes. I began to work with other veterans to bring our experiences to the American people. We took to the streets demonstrating what it meant to occupy another country. We testified to the realities of the war. We raised awareness of the destruction. The systems that perpetuate the war carried on without being affected. Throughout history, it is only when peoples have organized themselves to remove their participation and move to the offensive that systems have toppled. It is time that Veterans and GIs unite and organize to make the changes that we need to prevent future generations falling into the myths of militarism."

The Field Organizing Program is starting with only three full time organizers for 63 chapters and will hopefully expand over the next two-three years to as many as 20 organizers. This can only happen with your continued support. Learn more about how to sponsor a Field Organizer at: www.ivaw.org

WE WANT YOU OR YOUR GROUP TO SPONSOR AN IVAW FIELD ORGANIZER?

Right now, Iraq Veterans Against the War is laying the groundwork for an extensive Field Organizing Program, and *we need your support*.

We are looking for 100 groups and 500 individuals – religious organizations, union locals, peace groups, other community organizations, and you – **to sponsor a Field Organizer for one year**.

Why a Field Organizing Program? Why Now?
After Winter Soldier last year, IVAW doubled in size – both in members and number of chapters. Up until then, IVAW's organizing structure was mostly centralized, with the national IVAW orchestrating national mobilizations, while local chapters did their own thing with insufficient support to grow and develop. IVAW's rapid expansion in 2008 has changed this reality.

We must increase our capacity at the grassroots level to systematically build sustainable chapters, with strong leaders, that will be able to engage in sophisticated campaigns over the long haul. With the escalation in Afghanistan, the continuing occupation in Iraq, and the growing crisis in veterans' health care, an IVAW Field Organizing Program at this time is a necessity.

IVAW's Organizing Model
1. Vision: Building a GI and veterans movement to end the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, attain quality health care, and rebuild Iraq.
2. Develop leaders who are committed to a leadership development process and participation in movement building toward long-term collective transformation.
3. Execute Focal Point Campaigns as an arena in which to develop leaders

How You Can Help
Talk to your group about sponsoring an IVAW Field Organizer. The cost for a Field Organizer, including expenses, is $45K. If 100 groups give $900, we can fund 2 Field Organizers, including their expenses. If 500 individuals sponsor a field organizer at 15 dollars a month (180 annual) we will be able to fund 2 more Field Organizers.

Your group can sponsor with a one-time payment of $900, or a monthly or quarterly contribution.
You can sponsor with a one-time payment of $180, or a monthly or quarterly contribution.

To donate please make checks out to *IVAW (write Field Organizing in the memo)* and send to *IVAW Field Organizing Program, 630 9th Ave. Suite 807, New York, NY 10036* and to receive information about the Sponsorship Program, fill in the information below:

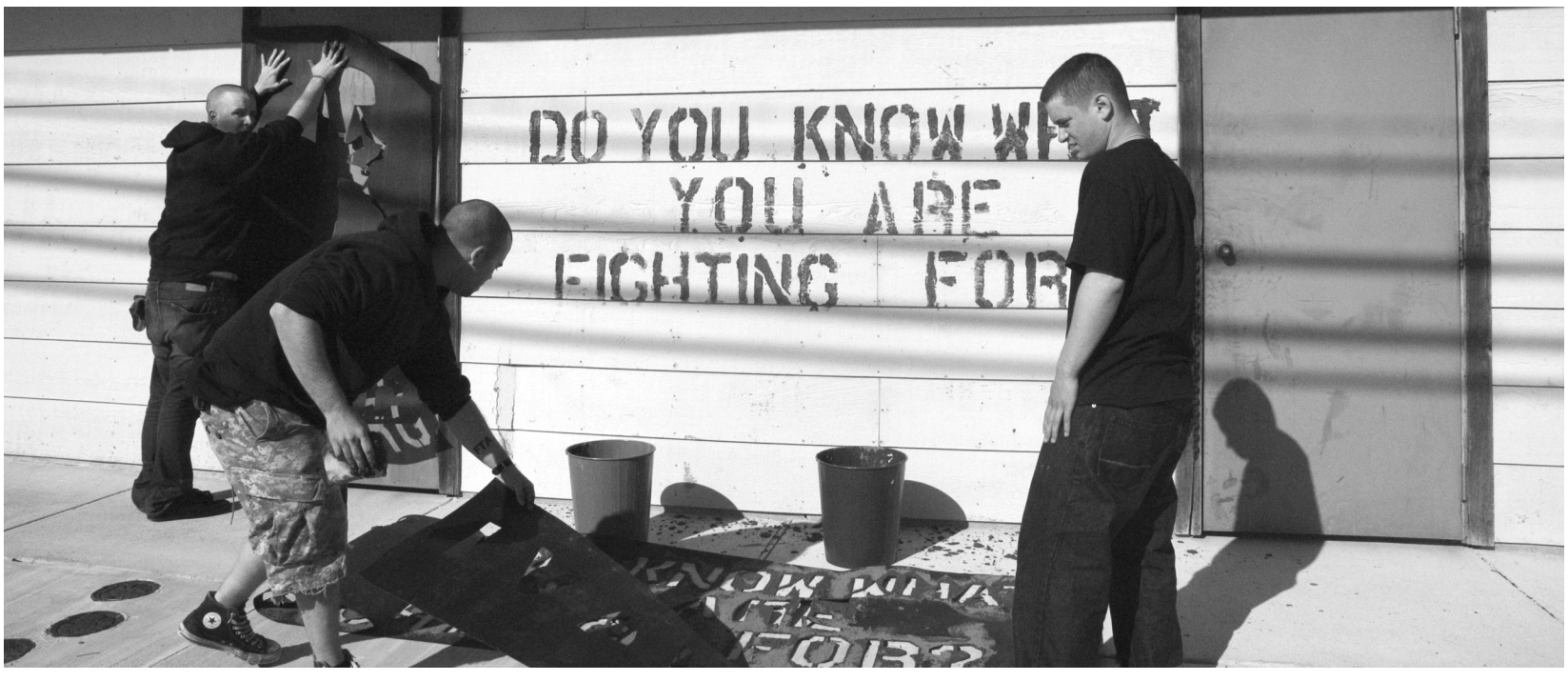
Your Group: _____

Group Contact Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Email Address: _____ Phone #: _____



IVAW on Fort Hood Outreach Mission

Iraq: What Now For IVAW?

T.J. Buonomo

Under the terms of the Status of Forces Agreement, the US government is legally bound to withdraw its troops from Iraq by the end of 2011. Barring war with Iran or a sudden flare-up of violence in Iraq, troop withdrawals should proceed roughly within the time line outlined in the SOFA. This presents a raison d'etre question for Iraq Veterans Against the War, founded in opposition to the US military occupation of Iraq.

This question has created ambiguity and anxiety within the Veteran wing of the movement accustomed to identifying and drawing moral authority and credibility primarily from firsthand experience in combat or combat support roles. As the military aspect of the conflict takes on an increasingly less prominent role, our authority in the public eye is reduced in significance. While deeply frustrating to many, this also opens an opportunity for internal education and a broadening of perspective essential to continue our fight.

Although political and economic matters generally receive more quiet attention outside of business newspapers and are not widely paid attention to within our movement, an awareness and understanding of these issues is critical. The question of who has control over what resources is almost invariably the root cause of all conflict. The history of US-Iraq relations demonstrates this very well. Since the late 1950s when the US established ties with Saddam Hussein against an anti-imperialist Iraqi government, oil has never ceased to be a primary concern for successive administrations, though US access to it has been limited for several decades up until the 2003 invasion. Since 2003 it has been an issue of primary concern for the Bush and now the Obama administration

What is happening today is essentially a repeat of history in many respects. Just as the British in the post-WWI era occupied Iraq and eventually established control over Iraq's newly discovered oil fields, our military has been used to pave the way for US oil companies to reestablish their dominant position in Iraq. Overt collaboration would have been out of the question given the political and military consequences, but behind-the-scenes diplomatic efforts to accomplish this objective have been ongoing since at least 2002.

This would lead to deep resentment and long term political instability in Iraq, perpetuating the cycle of socioeconomic retardation imposed by Western powers through repeated interference throughout the wider region. It would also serve as a convenient, effectively engineered pretext for pressuring the Iraqi government to extend the terms of the SOFA to allow for an indefinite US military presence, significantly reduced in size but nonetheless capable of maintaining a US allied government in power. President Obama has not demonstrated himself to be willing to engage in such cynical statecraft but his predecessor's vice president and other members of the administration certainly were; and they enjoyed the virtually unquestioning loyalty of most of their party members in Congress.

Where do these events place the Veteran wing of the anti-imperialist movement? They place us in the unique and very challenging position of having to become experts of US foreign policy on the fly. It goes without saying that this is not our natural strength, which is for most of us 'on the ground' at the tactical and operational levels. But this is the direction in which we must evolve if we are to complete the spirit of our mission, which is the restoration of full sovereignty to Iraq. This does not mean simply a withdrawal of troops but also economic self-determination, which requires Iraqi control over Iraqi resources. This is what the leaders of US oil companies and their allies in government wish to deny the Iraqi people. They are our enemy. It is time for us to learn how to fight them.

The Iraqi oil unions have successfully resisted foreign control over their industry since the 2003 invasion, when they forced Halliburton to withdraw from their oil fields. Since then they have toured the US twice, meeting with American labor leaders, anti-imperialist activists and members of Congress. In March 2008, IVAW member Aaron Hughes and myself traveled to Erbil, Iraq to meet with the leaders of this political resistance movement. It is critical that we develop this cross-border relationship and provide them with tangible assistance, financial and political, if we are to succeed against our common adversary.

The reaction of those who are not accustomed to organizing across borders in opposition to the political/business elites of their own country is to label those who do as 'communists' or 'socialists' but in reality three things are clear: (1) 'globalization' is nothing more than the organizing efforts of these elites in pursuit of their interests across borders; (2) they are not concerned with the culture, customs, language or religion of their counterparts in other nations so long as their collaboration results in opening new markets for investment; (3) in the case of militarist policies used to force open markets and exploit labor, their interests are not ours; (4) if we do not organize across borders, i.e. globalize our resistance, we will lose what is in fact our common and inextricably linked struggle.

Since the 1970s, multinational corporations have been able to invest capital more profitably in cheaper labor throughout the developing world, thus neutralizing the power of organized labor. These defeats will continue so long as the labor movement does not follow suit and globalize. Iraq presents a tremendous opportunity because it has become a lightning rod of grassroots political opposition throughout American society, including among the labor unions of the AFL-CIO, the largest labor organization in the US.

Our next most likely ally is the renewable energy movement, which is becoming an increasingly formidable political force in the US. This movement is naturally hostile to the continued market dominance of the fossil fuel industry because this dominance allows it to wield its tremendous collective financial resources on the political field of battle in order to perpetuate its power and stifle government support for alternative energy sources.

It is clear that US dependence on foreign oil, perpetuated by the influence of US oil companies, is a threat to our collective security for several reasons. One is the potential economic consequence. No less significant is the temptation it has created, and to which successive administrations have succumbed, to interfere in the internal politics of foreign nations, leading to the rise of militant nationalism and terrorism. The global conflict we find ourselves in today did not begin on September 11, 2001 or at the end of the Soviet-Afghan war but decades ago. In fact it can be traced back at least into the 1950s. This is the narrative we as Veterans need to communicate on a national level if we are to fulfill our moral obligation to the Iraqi people and to save our nation from the disastrous course successive administrations have led us down in pursuit of wealth built on the precarious foundations of Empire.

T.J. Buonomo is a former Military Intelligence Officer and member of the Board of Directors of Iraq Veterans Against the War. His views are his own and not necessarily representative of IVAW.

Ryan Endicott, IVAW member and former Marine, at the Memorial at Sea in Seal Beach, California, August 2009

Iraqi Labor Tour DC Report

Denice Lomabad

Why do we do solidarity work? Because it affirms our fellowship and links us as people. Because it reaches our hearts, not just our heads. Because it heals divisions and wounds, both inflicted and internalized. Because it inspires us to carry on the fight.

Solidarity work is another way to fight for peace. It reaches people in a different way. When we connect with Iraqi individuals who live under US occupation and war and find common ground, our fight takes on a far more personal dimension.

Such was the case when USLAW and IVAW teamed up in September to host five Iraqi labor leaders on a speaking tour in conjunction with participation in the AFL-CIO convention in Pittsburgh. The Solidarity Center (a non-profit organization established by the AFL-CIO to help build a global labor movement by strengthening the economic and political power of workers around the world through effective, independent and democratic unions) brought the Iraqis to the convention. We wanted to bring them to the public.

About 60 people gathered at Westminster Presbyterian Church to welcome the Iraqis and hear them talk about their lives. Then we switched seats. The Iraqis heard about organizing that activists in Washington, DC were doing. Panel member Geoff Millard described IVAW's work. Community members working for housing and voting rights spoke about their work. Ben Butler from American Federation of Government Employees talked about their fight against DC Mayor Fenty's attacks on city services and workers, after-school childcare programs and teachers.

Steve Yoczik and Aaron Hughes went to the Hill to lobby for Iraqi labor rights, determined to find a representative to sponsor a briefing. They accomplished their goal in Jan Schakowsky's office. Lynn Woolsey and Raul Grijalva, co-chairs of the Progressive Caucus, added their names to the invitation.

Two nights later we gathered at IVAW's house in DC and barbecued a feast. Though communication was challenging with only a few bilingual English-Arabic speakers in the room, Iraqi labor leaders and Iraq war veterans met on common ground, breaking bread and drinking beer together as friends. Executive Director Jose Vasquez came down on the train from NYC to meet our Iraqi brothers.

After Pittsburgh, New York City and Philadelphia, the Iraqi men returned to DC the day before their departure back to Iraq. Arriving unshowered, unshaven and exhausted and unable to get early check-in at the hotel, they pleaded to push back the Congressional Briefing so they could spiff up. Sorry guys, no can do!! We've got a busy afternoon planned for you! So they sucked it up with great attitudes.

Before heading to the Hill, they met with the national steering committee of the Communication Workers of America, the first international union in the AFL-CIO to affiliate with USLAW.

The briefing on Capitol Hill was a success. Though no representatives attended (which is common) four legislative assistants and a number of congressional interns had very good questions for the Iraqis. We will be following up with each of them. Aaron asked each congressional staff person to encourage their representatives to talk to union and working people, not just officials if they go to Iraq. He asked them to bring the issue of Iraqi labor rights back to their congressperson and consider leading on a sign-on letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Meeting at the end of the day at a Lebanese restaurant, Mama Ayesha's, to debrief and say farewell, the Iraqis shared how important it is to them to have our organizations' support. Then Hassan Juma'a, head of the Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions, said he wanted to make a comment about Aaron.(Aaron had escorted these gentlemen from one end of the tour to the other in his van and put everything he had into this tour.) Hassan said that he sensed that Aaron carried around a lot of guilt and that he needn't feel guilty as his military service in Iraq is what transformed him into the activist and organizer he is today working on their behalf.

I was honored to be able to help the Iraqis get their voices heard in the US. I was equally honored to work with a great bunch of veterans with big hearts, great integrity and political savvy. I look forward to our next project together!

Denice lombard is the Chair of the International Solidarity Committee of US Labor Against the War. This was the third tour of Iraqi labor leaders Denice has been a part of.

Sgt. Israel Garcia: The Ritual

He and the battle went down two weeks
before his third tour would have ended.
At twenty-four he's done with
the chore of living.

On the local paper's page three
you could see a thumb nail portrait of him—
a three column picture of the widow, mother and father.

"I have three children
and they're all safe because of Sgt. Garcia"
the US Representative supposed.

"It's an important day for us—
and a sad day" said mom Maricruz.
Dad Victor still looked stunned.
Sunglasses guarded Lesly's eyes
from inquisitive stares and the glare of
posthumous Silver and Bronze Stars
—and other chest salad.

And Israel?
He existed, enlisted and desisted
but lingers in them for lasting,
and private,
ceremonies.

—Horace Coleman

Shortly after writing this poem, I found this on pages 51-52 of the September 2009 of the Reader's Digest in the Outrageous column written by Michael Crowley:

"In July 2008, Taliban fighters attacked a US outpost in the Afghan village of Wanat, killing nine American troops and wounding 27. Military investigators later discovered a local police chief had helped carry out the attack. At his police post, they found a cache of more than 70 US assault rifles that were probably US-supplied. The investigators picked up three more guns near the battle site itself."

Sgt.Garcia died in this battle.

Pain

Pain
can be your friend
if you don't mind
being
a lonely
melancholy
alcoholic.

Not that anyone asked,
but I'm going to write
about
my greatest pain.

It wasn't
lying on the battlefield
both my hands
covered with blood
and
me not knowing
where it all
was coming from.

It wasn't that.

It wasn't
freezing on Highway One
with tracers whipping by,
me unable to move
as I listened
to the wounded
and their screams.

It wasn't that.

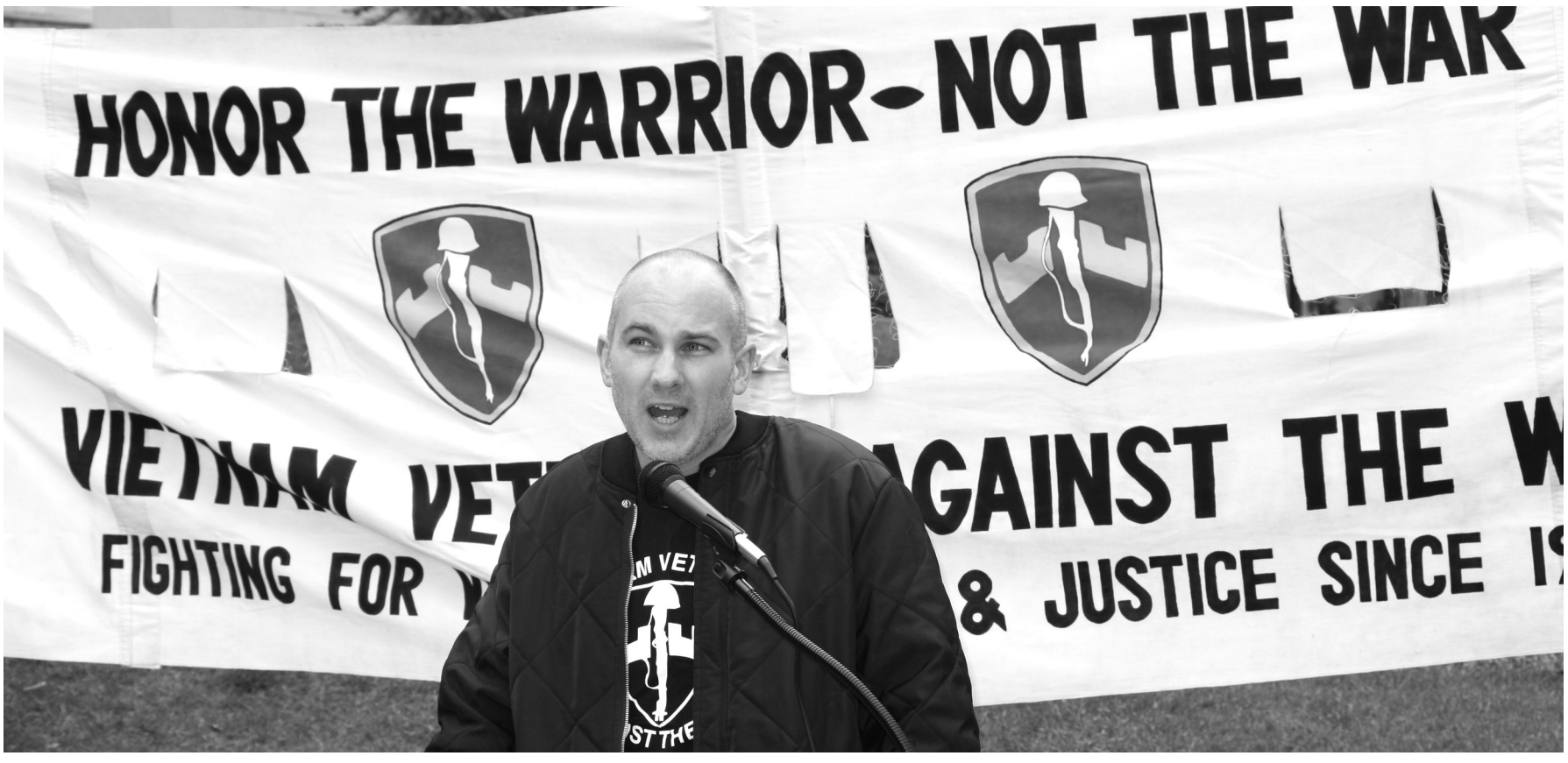
It wasn't
administering first aid
to a gut-shot boy
who died
despite my frenzied efforts
to save him.

It wasn't that.

It was
an 8-year-old-girl
staring at me
with
hatred
because
her older sister
had just been
consumed
by that fuckin' war,
and the 8-year-old,
once my friend,
now despised me
because
she thought
it was my fault.

But it wasn't.

—Paul Hellweg



Ken Nielsen at VVAW Memorial Day event in Chicago, 2009

Winning Was Never An Option in Vietnam

Joe Miller (reviewer)

Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War, 1945-1975
John Prados
(University Press of Kansas, 2009)

Nearly ten years ago, in a review of another book on Vietnam, Barry Romo asked, "After all these years since the American War in Southeast Asia and the forests of trees that have been cut down to document that war, do we really need another book?" My response, after reading John Prados' latest – rather hefty – volume on the war, is "Hell, yes!" We certainly need this one.

John Prados is a senior fellow of the National Security Archive at George Washington University and a longtime friend of VVAW. His numerous books include *The Blood Road: The Ho Chi Minh Trail and the Vietnam War* and *The Hidden History of the Vietnam War*.

Prados utilizes a wide range of newly-available sources, including recently-declassified National Security Agency (NSA) documents, presidential tapes, as well as interviews conducted at VVAW's fortieth anniversary reunion in Chicago in 2007, to tell a story of missed or ignored opportunities for very different results surrounding US policy in Vietnam and in Asia more generally. A significant aspect of this book for VVAW is the fact that he incorporates our story into the wider context. In his Preface he makes this case:

"I chose to focus on one particular group: Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). This group played a central role at several crucial moments, yet except for accounts that center on the organization itself, it has only a bit part in standard Movement histories. My narrative introduces new evidence of the extent to which the US government initiated an explicit campaign to 'get' VVAW, illustrating how the government played simultaneously on the war and anti-war boards. As a veterans' organization, VVAW also furnishes a natural link to another aspect of the narrative – how controversies over the war affected US military forces themselves, ultimately leading back to the nation's ability to carry on a war in Southeast Asia." (p. xiv)

. . . the Vietnamese genius in politics and military tactics are clearly illustrated in Prados' use of newly available sources.

Prados is critical of previous accounts of the war for reflecting "atomized" views, that is, accounts that focus on one or the other singular aspect of the war. In this work, he is attempting to provide as complete an account as possible, using unified field theory, by which he means an effort to "weave an account of both action and context that includes all necessary elements." (p. iii)

As the reader is drawn through the events of 1945 to 1955, the period that for Prados sets the entire framework for the rest of our adventure in Vietnam, we are carried along on a roller-coaster ride of international crises and potential choices. We are introduced to the major characters in this tragedy, from the US leaders and policymakers who seem to show up in a variety of administrations in later years to those individuals who became our "clients" in the unofficial empire in Vietnam and elsewhere.

Once the commitments were made, most solidly by an Eisenhower administration that felt responsible for the French defeat in 1954, the die is pretty much cast. While Prados describes the wide range of policy options available to the US in the immediate post-World War II environment, at each stage choices were made that severely narrowed the possibilities.

Kennedy came into office inheriting the commitments and Cold War perspective from the Eisenhower days. His counter-insurgency focus reflected a different view of the situation in South Vietnam, more as what we now think of as a "low-intensity" conflict. Even so, events on the ground and choices made by the "best and the brightest" to show US determination in the Cold War resulted in a deeper commitment, financial and military. Prados provides us with all the details necessary to explain the choices made, if not to fully understand them. By the time Kennedy was assassinated and Lyndon Johnson assumed the presidency, it would prove nearly impossible for him to avoid greater entanglement. The rest of the story is familiar to most of us, though we must certainly thank this author for giving us the historical detail and context with which to ultimately understand our various experiences as veterans of this war.

The Vietnamese story is also prominent in this 600-page work. After all, it was their determined struggle for national unification and independence that our policymakers ignored or misunderstood over thirty years. These details and the Vietnamese genius in politics and military tactics are clearly illustrated in Prados' use of newly-available sources.

He draws us into the politics of the anti-war movement, with the focus on VVAW, its actions and the official response to those actions. He shows with great detail the efforts of the Nixon administration to destroy VVAW, especially following the 1971 Winter Soldier Investigation and Dewey Canyon III. Many of our members will recognize themselves in the unfolding of these events. As veterans or active duty GIs, our part in the movement to end this war is revealed in the overall story.

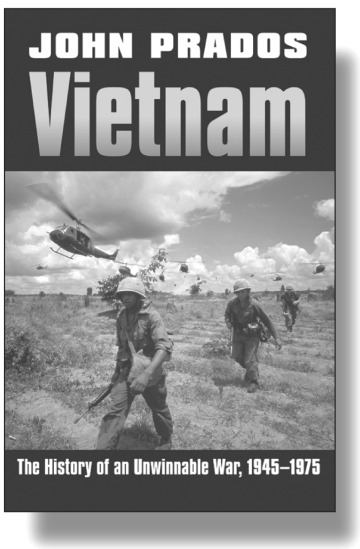
As part of Prados' unified general theory approach, he must place the reader into the total context, as much as is possible. This he does very well indeed. Also, with sixty pages of footnotes and a bibliographic essay, we are not left wanting for source material. If you only had to have one book on the Vietnam War, this is the one.

Joe Miller is a national coordinator of VVAW.

NOW AVAILABLE

Vietnam
The History of an Unwinnable War, 1945–1975
John Prados

This explosive history opens with—and repeatedly returns to—the VVAW story in its account of how the antiwar movement came to confine U.S. presidents in a 'Big White Jailhouse.' By turns engaging narrative history, compelling analytic treatise, and moving personal account, it covers the battles, the politics, the Vietnamese north and south, and every aspect of the bitter war in Vietnam.



"Prados has given us a great gift—a fresh, original, and fascinating synthesis of a long and complicated war by one of the nation's foremost experts." —**Christian G. Appy**, author of *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides*

"Few if any historians know the Vietnam records as well as Prados. His provocative new book should be read by the lawmakers and opinion leaders who habitually babble on about the 'lessons of the Vietnam War.'"—**Ronald Spector**, author of *After Tet: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam*

"Prados's scrupulous marshaling of facts offers a much-needed antidote to the new crop of ideologues and their revisionist theories about the Vietnam War."—**A. J. Langguth**, author of *Our Vietnam: The War 1954–1975*

704 pages, 48 photographs, Cloth $34.95

University Press of Kansas
Phone 785-864-4155 · Fax 785-864-4586 · www.kansaspress.ku.edu

No Reason For Dying

Horace Coleman (reviewer)

No Reason for Dying: A Reluctant Combat Pilot's Confession of Hypocrisy, Infidelity and War
Brian H. Settles
(BookSurge Publishing, 2009)

Brian Settles is a Nam vet fighter / bomber jock. He was an F4C GIB (Guy in the Back) when the Air Force hadn't yet decided it was cheaper to lose a pilot and a navigator than two pilots if a plane went down.

[Disclaimer: I know this guy. We've been e-mail buddies for years. The last time I saw him in the flesh was during a lay over in LA when he was still flying for an airline--and writing this memoir. –HC]

Settles grew up in Muncie, Indiana. I grew up a few hours drive east in Ohio and visited Muncie often to visit an aunt. Both places were pretty much same same. Both of us were young lieutenants in Nam.

He partied in the DOOM (Da Nang Officers Open Mess). After being so bored out of my mind below the Mekong Delta that I asked for a transfer to Dong Ha, my CO sent me to the land of the TOOM (Tan Son Nhut). I spent my time hooking up fighter bombers–carrying the same ordnance Settles' bird was putting on targets in northern South Vietnam and southern North Vietnam—with airborne forward air traffic controllers.

When I left Nam, I was credited with 99 aircraft saves and rescues. Settles flew 199 missions and spent dangerous hours ducking AA fire by the time his tour ended. I'd been back in "the world" less than two months when Martin Luther King was assassinated.

Settles was still stateside but would be Nam bound in a few months. The day King was killed, he overheard a couple of instructor pilots at Davis-Monthan AFB talking about the murder. One said to the other "Well, he was asking for it."

Brian Settles has the same parentage as Barack Obama--white mother, black father. He was adopted at an early age by a black couple, grew up in a black neighborhood, excelled at high school basketball (until a career ending injury), then entered a local college, joined ROTC, went on active duty and successfully completed flight school.

The death of pilots he met in flight school and squadron mates are mixed together with descriptions of combat missions, hangin' with black EMs in Da Nang, down time in the O Club, "comfort sex" and the feelings a black troop could have about being in Nam while the Civil Rights war "back in the world" raged and blazed:

"I read the daily headlines of the Stars and Stripes and witness the delayed news accounts of the cities burning . . ."

"…It leaves me feeling I sold out on remaining at home to fight for racial justice and equality."

"When the words gook, slope-heads, slant-eyes are spoken, I hear nigger."

"We are guests in this country, ostensibly fighting to preserve democracy for the South Vietnamese against communist aggression, but what about our aggression, our condescension toward even our allies? Do we have a franchise to come here and call these people dumb zips or stupid gooks ....?"

". . . Are we justified staring down our noses at these people who were cultivating their civilization a thousand years before America was born?"

Vietnam was a different war for every person depending on MOS and what year and Corps you were in. Nevertheless, any where you go, you take you with you. And, leave some self there. And take some "there" here.

Same same Iraq and Afghanistan? Or Pakistan?

An interesting Epilogue tells what some of the people Settles grew up with or met in flight school or Nam did in later life.

Horace Coleman was an Air Force air traffic controller / intercept director in Vietnam (1967-68). He also served in Tactical Air Command, Pacific Air Command and North American Air Defense. He speaks at grade schools, high schools and churches and lives in Long Beach, CA.

Chicago Summer Standdown, 2009

Book Note

Jerry Lembcke

Thirty Years After: New Essays on Vietnam War Literature, Film, and Art edited by Mark Heberle and published by Cambridge Scholars, came out of a November 2005 conference in Honolulu sponsored by the University of Hawaii and the East-West Center. A magnificent volume that includes Tim O'Brien's keynote address and 35 other chapters formed from presentations made at the conference. *Thirty Years After* updates cultural studies of the war with chapters like "Virtual Nam" (a study of war games), chapters on the representations of the war in Italian literature and song, new studies of Vietnamese film and poetry and the legacy of Vietnam for the representations of new American wars in *Jarhead* and *In The Valley of Elah.*

Jerry Lembcke is an Assoc. Prof. in the Department of Sociology/ Anthropology at Holy Cross College in Worcester, MA.

Men Don't Cry

Joseph Giannini

The alarm is set for 4:30 A.M. I wake suddenly at 4:28 A.M. A trick I learned in the Marine Corps. I re-set the alarm to 6:30 for Nikki. I have to be on the 5:58 train from Amagansett to New York City. I have a robbery case, on for trial, in Kings Supreme Court. Get out of bed. Pull on a pair of sweats. Walk into our kitchen. Give Cody a milk bone. Let him out back and Mr. Hobbes in from his nightly hunt. Pour some cat food into a bowl and milk in another. Put them down. Get the coffee going. Turn on the radio. It's set to NPR. I've tuned into a program about men crying in public. Listen while I brush my teeth, shave and shower. The consensus: Crying in public isn't cool. Unless it's from grief. There are other exceptions. Nothing about war.

Vic, my Dad, taught me not to cry in public. He was a tough guy. Grew up on the rough streets of Crown Heights, Brooklyn. Built like a fireplug. Large square shoulders. Strong arms. Big hands. Powerful legs. He loved to fight and to box. Was an undefeated Welter Weight Champ in the Army. His toughest fight, in the ring, was against a very fast black boxer. The guy kept moving and avoiding punches, then countering and scoring effectively. Vic saw that when he threw his right the guy usually moved left. Vic threw two left jabs. Feinted a right. Then shot it where he thought the guy would move. He did. The punch landed. Broke his jaw. Blood spilled from his mouth and left ear.

I was five when Vic started teaching me how to box. Everything off the left jab. Double it up. Go up and down. End with a hook. He was involved in the boxing game. Would sometimes take me to the local gyms. By age 6, I was meeting some of the pros, like Rocky Castellano and Lulu Perez. Regulars on the Gillette Cavalcade of Sports. With Vic I saw some of the greatest fights and fighters: like Rocky Marciano, Sugar Ray Robinson, and Carmine Basilio. He was teaching me to be tough.

One night Vic came into my room. I jumped up to greet him. Standing on my bed I was equal to his shoulders. Holding up his opened palms he said, "OK kid, let me see what you've got." I shot off two left jabs. Both slammed into his right palm. Then a straight right that missed his left palm. Hit him in the mouth. He started to counter with a left hook. I flinched as he caught himself. He touched his lower lip. Looked at the blood on his fingers and said, " You've got heavy hands."

We have been suckered! I dive back into my bunker. Rounds continue falling onto our position. Deafening thumps shaking the earth.

My father taught me many things: Men don't hit women; men don't show affection in public; nothing is black and white; don't judge a man by his color; Republicans are for the rich man, Democrats for the working man; lose your head, lose your fight; always get in the first punch; life doesn't get easier and men don't cry.

In December 1967 Vic is 47. I'm 23 in Vietnam leading a Marine rifle platoon. My Battalion, First Battalion Third Marines, aka "The Home Of The Brave," is ordered to occupy a hill up north near Gio Lin. Called Alpha Three. It's right below the DMZ, aka the Dead Marine Zone. Our mission is to defend the hill and the Navy Seabees building a combat case on it.

It's the monsoon season. Cold, windy, with unrelenting torrential rains. We chopper in at dusk. Move onto the Hill under the cover of darkness. In no time we are soaked to the bone, freezing and miserable. We stake out a perimeter and dig in. There isn't any dry ground. Ultimately we lay down in the mud. In my mind I keep repeating "This will be over some day." I curl into a fetal position. Wedge my hands between my legs. Try to grab my Beach Dream, about lying on a beach in the sun back home. The cold rains keep washing it away.

This soon-to-be Combat Base will be part of the McNamara Line. A string of bases extending from the China Sea west to the Laotian border. The concept being, the defenders will use electronic surveillance to detect the North Vietnamese Army coming down from the DMZ. Then intercept and destroy them. I don't think so.

The night slowly passes without incident. The next day one of our patrols walks into a command-detonated claymore. Suffers two KIAs and several WIAs. The NVA are watching us from their camouflaged positions in the surrounding jungle. The incoming starts: artillery, mortars, recoil-less rifles. Most deadly, rockets with delayed detonating fuses. These rockets can penetrate anything the Seabees can build. We dig deeper, knowing that surviving is just luck. This hill could be a smaller Dien Ben Phu. A 1954 battle in the French Indo China War. The Viet Min, now the NVA, surrounded 15,000 French soldiers and decisively defeated them. Ending that war and beginning this one.

The incoming is continuously intermittent. Leaving your hole is a deadly decision. Some Marines have been killed using the piss tube or shitter. We become giant filthy rodents. Fearfully darting in and about.

On December 7, the sun breaks through. The rains stop. I look up and out. It's quiet. I wait. Listen. No incoming. Cautiously I come out. It's still quiet. I begin to stretch and look around. Suddenly two short whistles, artillery rounds, go right over my head. They explode in my platoon position. Right where the Fucking New Guys are standing. They disappear in a large brown cloud. We have been suckered! I dive back into my bunker. Rounds continue falling onto our position. Deafening thumps shaking the earth. More so on my previous platoon, Bravo One, tied into our right flank.

Someone yells, "Corpsman up, Corpsman up." I push down my fear and run to the new guys. One has been hit in the right hind. A huge piece of flesh has been ripped away leaving a gaping red crater and his leg dislodged from his hip. The other has lost his right arm – severed at the elbow. I find his muddy limb. Put it with him in his poncho. Both are carried toward the Field Hospital. Lucky bastards. Only two days In Country and they're rotating back to the World. Million Dollar Wounds.

I run over to Bravo One's position. Some of their bunkers have taken direct hits. There are many casualties, including the platoon leader, Lieutenant Grosshans. Bravo one was my first command. I had the platoon for five months. I was getting too close to them and they were taken from me. They start calling out to me, "How bad is it Lieutenant?" Meaning how bad are they hit. They all have multiple shrapnel wounds. I assure each one, "You're OK and you're out of here." Each Marine is laid in his own poncho and carried away. The sun disappears behind low gray clouds. Cold, wind-driven rains sweep over the hill. I don't hide my tears. Out here, men cry.

created by Robert Spicher

Joseph Giannini is a former Marine grunt who fought in 'Nam 1967-68 with the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines. He has been a member of VVAW since the first Gulf War.

Where We Came from,Who We Are,Who Can Join

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc. (VVAW) is a national veterans' organization that was founded in New York City in 1967 after six Vietnam vets marched together in a peace demonstration. It was organized to voice the growing opposition among returning servicemen and women to the still-raging war in Indochina, and grew rapidly to a membership of over 30,000 throughout the United States, including active duty GIs stationed in Vietnam. Through ongoing actions and grassroots organization, VVAW exposed the ugly truth about US involvement in Southeast Asia and our first-hand experiences helped many other Americans to see the unjust nature of that war.

VVAW also took up the struggle for the rights and needs of veterans. In 1970, we began the first rap groups to deal with traumatic aftereffects of war, setting the example for readjustment counseling at vet centers today. We exposed the shameful neglect of many disabled vets in VA hospitals and helped draft legislation to improve educational benefits and create job programs. VVAW fought for amnesty for war resisters, including vets with bad discharges. We helped make known the negative health effects of exposure to chemical defoliants and the VA's attempts to cover up these conditions as well as their continued refusal to provide treatment and compensation for many Agent Orange victims.

Today our government still finances and arms undemocratic and repressive regimes around the world in the name of "democracy." American troops have again been sent into open battle in the Middle East and covert actions in Latin America, for many of the same misguided reasons that were used to send us to Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, many veterans from all eras are still denied justice—facing unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, while already inadequate services are cut back or eliminated.

We believe that service to our country and communities did not end when we were discharged. We remain committed to the struggle for peace and for social and economic justice for all people. We will continue to oppose senseless military adventures and to teach the real lessons of the Vietnam War. We will do all we can to prevent future generations from being put through a similar tragedy, and we will continue to demand dignity and respect for veterans of all eras. This is real patriotism and we remain true to our mission. Anyone who supports this overall effort, whether Vietnam veteran or not, veteran or not, may join us in this long-term struggle. JOIN US!

Insignia of Vietnam Veterans Against the War

We took the MACV patch as our own, replacing the sword with the upside-down rifle with helmet, the international symbol of soldiers killed in action. This was done to expose the lies and hypocrisy of US aggression in Vietnam as well as its cost in human lives. The original MACV insignia also put forward lies. The US military was not protecting (the sword) the Vietnamese from invasion from the People's Republic of China (the China Gates), but was instead trying to "save" Vietnam from itself.

Our insignia has come to represent veterans fighting against new "adventures" like the Vietnam War, while at the same time fighting for a decent way of life for veterans and their families.

Our insignia is more than 30 years old. It belongs to VVAW, and no other organization or group may use it for any reason without permission.

Beware of VVAW AI

This notice is to alert you to a handful of individuals calling themselves the "Vietnam Veterans Against the War Anti-Imperialist" (VVAW-AI). VVAW-AI is actually the creation of an obscure ultraleft sect, designed to confuse people in order to associate themselves with VVAW's many years of activism and struggle. They are not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW, Inc. and are not affiliated with us in any way. We urge all people and organizations to beware of this bogus outfit.

SUPPORT VVAW! DONATE OR JOIN TODAY!

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.
VVAW Membership

P.O. Box 2065, Station A
Champaign, IL 61825-2065

Membership Application

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____
Email address _____
Branch _____
Dates of Service (if applicable) _____
Unit _____
Military Occupation _____
Rank _____
Overseas Duty _____
Dates _____

☐ Yes, add me to the VVAW email list.
☐ I do not wish to join, but wish to make a donation to the work of VVAW.
☐ Sign me up for a lifetime membership in VVAW. $250 is enclosed.

Membership in VVAW is open to ALL people who want to build a veterans' movement that fights for peace and justice. Most of our members are veterans of the Vietnam era, but we welcome veterans of all eras, as well as family members and friends to our ranks. The annual membership fee is $25.00 (not required of homeless, unemployed or incarcerated vets).

VVAW is a democratic organization. Chapters decide on local programs and projects under the general guidelines of the national program. Chapters elect local leadership and representatives to annual national meetings where major organizational decisions are made and national coordinators elected. These coordinators are responsible for the day-to-day organizational leadership of VVAW and issuing national publications.

Signature _____

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RECOLLECTIONS

Dedicated REMF Then and Dedicated REMF Now

STEVE CRANDALL

I've heard more than one comment coming from combat veterans regarding a lack of respect for REMFs, like if you weren't a combat veteran you weren't there. I was a weapons loader of F-4 aircraft at Danang in 1970 and yes, I was a REMF, a Rear Echesulon Mother Fucker.

In Vietnam we not only had names for the Vietnamese we even had names for our own troops. We called the guys that worked in the bomb dump "BEE BEE STACKERS" and the guys that worked on the guns "MUZZLE FUCKERS." But there is no doubt, without them we would not have been able to do our jobs effectively and the weapons would not have reached their destination.

In May of 1970 my support for the war ended when four students were killed by the National Guard at Kent State. I still had eight months left to go to serve out my year in Vietnam. My attitude about the war didn't stop my support of the combat troops on the front line. The other three members of our four man crew had the same feeling about the war. We kept our spirits high by reminding ourselves that we are here to support the combat troops and to get the planes off the ground in hopes of squelching enemy fire. We took some short cuts to turn around the planes as quickly as possible. The short cuts included not putting all the safety pins in the ejection seat and not strapping the bombs during the loading process. For this one of the best loading crews was disbanded. I and one other member of our crew were sent to a Lead Crew where we trained and certified FNGs, one more name to add to the list. The other two crew members were separated and joined other crews. I never saw them again after Vietnam and sometimes wonder what they are doing today.

I went back to finish college, married and had two children. I tried to talk about Vietnam when I was in college but quickly learned that none of the students wanted to hear about it and besides they wouldn't understand anyway. I never talked to my wife about it for the same reasons. Because veterans didn't speak about Vietnam it was hard to know who was a veteran and who was not. I buried myself with work and family life to the point I didn't even remember I was a veteran. Only after marrying again some years later did I finally have someone who would listen and provide support so that I could proudly say I was a Vietnam veteran, even though I was only a REMF.

Being a REMF, I wouldn't pretend to compare what I did to the courage of what it took to be on the front lines. I don't suffer from PTSD like so many combat troops do and I wasn't wounded. I can though, compare some similar instances about fitting back into society, especially since we all served in an unpopular war. I can also compare the dedication I had for doing my job to support the troops and buddies. I would also like to think I can compare the dedication we have today to support returning troops, fighting for veterans' rights, fighting for veterans' benefits and fighting to stop the theft of veterans' land. But sadly, over the passing of time, the dedication has waned with both combat troops and REMFs alike.

So call me a REMF if you wish, just remember my dedication is as strong as it was nearly forty years ago. The question is "What does it take to get you dedicated again?"

STEVE CRANDALL IS THE PRESIDENT OF THE CALIFORNIA CENTRAL COAST CHAPTER OF VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR.

With General McChrystal at the Little Big Horn